Reading the Forest

A history and analysis of Forest of Dean literature

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A thesis submitted to the University of Gloucestershire in accordance with the requirements of the degree of PhD Religious, Philosophical and Historical Studies in the School of Education and Humanities

November 2019

Word Count

87,722

Abstract

This research identifies for the first time a distinctive body of literary work that is Forest of Dean literature. It establishes a history of this literature from its first appearances at the beginning of the nineteenth century up until the end of the twentieth century. It begins to identify some of the persistent ideas and stories about the Forest in literature, and demonstrates how these relate to changing cultural and economic circumstances.

By tracing the origins of the most persistent ideas and stories about the Forest to their first appearances in early-modern British topographies, travel writing, and early county histories, it demonstrates how these influenced subsequent writing set in or about the Forest of Dean. The research reveals how, emerging in the first half of the nineteenth century, four local writers produced novels and poems that began to describe the Forest as a distinctive place with a distinctive history, landscape and culture, and seeks to explain why this was: these are the first examples of Forest of Dean literature. A significant part of the thesis focuses on the development of Forest of Dean literature in the twentieth century and how this too responded to changing circumstances both locally and further afield. The final chapters of the thesis analyse key aspects of Forest of Dean literature: the myth of the Forest as isolated, the Forest as centre rather than periphery, and proposes the concept of a Forest gaze.

This research makes a contribution to the understanding of a literature of place, and in particular to demonstrate that the specificity of the Forest of Dean demands that its literature be considered, in-part, on its own terms. It makes a contribution to literary history in general and opens up this rich seam of Forest literature to wider appreciation and scholarly scrutiny.

Author Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed

Date 22nd November 2019

DOI: 10.46289/WESX0876

Acknowledgements

There are many people without whose support this thesis would not have been possible:

My Supervisory Team of Professor Shelley Saguaro and Dr Hannah Grist. Thank you for your patience, wisdom, guidance and encouragement. And in the early stages of study, Dr Iain Robertson.

Anne Dawson, my line manager at the University of Gloucestershire.

My colleague Dr Roger Deeks for encouragement, friendship, a supportive listening ear, and taking on a disproportionate amount of work to allow me the time and space to research for and write this thesis.

BBC Written Archives Centre, Gloucestershire Archives, Cinderford Library, and The Forester newspaper for access to their archives, and to Katy Beddington for access to the papers of the Harry Beddington estate.

Dr Lee Beard for his encouragement, and (though he has probably forgotten now) Dr Paul Harper for a listening ear many years ago.

The late Ralph Anstis, for inspiration and friendship. I will forever be in his debt for the bequest of his Forest book collection without which this research may never have begun.

And finally, Rachel, my wife, for patience, inexhaustible belief, relentless encouragement and support. My children too for their forbearance. And, the late Valerie Matthews for her strict instructions to complete this thesis, and so it is to her that this thesis is dedicated.

Contents

Introduction

Forest of Dean Literature

In the first half of the nineteenth century literary work began to emerge from the Forest of Dean that, to varying degrees, began to describe it not as simply the countryside, or as a forest much like any other, but instead as a particular, distinctive place with a distinctive history and culture. One of its authors at this time, William Wickenden was known as Bard of the Forest, whilst local poet Catherine Drew was known as the Forest Poetess. Along with two other local authors, Philip Ducarel, and Richard Morse, between them they wrote poetry, prose or narrative, about or set in the Forest of Dean. In 1858 H. G. Nicholls brought even greater focus to bear in describing the specificity of the Forest with his book *The Forest of Dean; An Historical and Descriptive Account*, a first history of the Forest in its own right. In the latter part of that century and early twentieth century, Forest-set novels and historical fiction, (by local inhabitants, former residents and sometimes writers who were briefly visiting or knew something of the area), as well as Forest of Dean travel guides, and memoirs, were published. These again were describing a distinctive place, the Forest of Dean.

Following the First World War, Gloucestershire author and soldier-poet F. W. Harvey moved to the Forest of Dean and not only began to write poems about local places, but also began to write and present radio broadcasts, many of which were concerned with describing the distinctiveness of the Forest. Towards the end of the Second World War, Harry Beddington was beginning to write comedy and drama plays for the local stage, then poetry and prose, entirely in Forest of Dean dialect. Central to much of his work was the distinctiveness of the Forest and its inhabitants.

In the 1950s former domestic servant Winifred Foley, (as this thesis will reveal, long before her supposed 1973 debut on BBC Radio's *Woman's* Hour), was writing and sending in her work to the BBC in the hope of it being heard.

Around the same time that *A Child in the Forest* (1973), (her memories of growing up in the Forest in the 1920s and 1930s), was broadcast others were writing their own memoirs, poetry, or local histories of the Forest of Dean. In that same year, 1973, The Forest Bookshop opened. As well as a retailer the bookshop was soon itself publishing Forest authors, as well producing audio albums of them in performance. Amongst these was Forest dialect poet Keith Morgan who still performs his work today.

There is then a rich and fascinating body of literary work set in or about the Forest of Dean that spans nearly two centuries. As this thesis will argue, it is work that has often incorporated ideas about the Forest (and forests in general) first found in Tudor topographies of Britain, early travel writing, and the first county histories; but it is also a literature that has responded to the changing historical, political and cultural context, both locally and further afield, at the time it was being written, and increasingly sought to describe the Forest as a singular, distinctive place unlike any other. This thesis explores some of the tropes to be found in Forest of Dean literature and examines how they both persist but also change across time as writers sought to depict the specificity of the Forest as a place. Across the entire period, the work of these authors has shared so much in their descriptions of the Forest of Dean and its local inhabitants, sometimes sharing the very same stories.

Some of these writers have been reasonably well-known, for example F. W. Harvey, Dennis Potter, Winifred Foley, whilst others have been known only amongst local Forest of Dean historians and book collectors. Several forgotten names are now being rediscovered and becoming more known locally through the publication of papers in the Forest of Dean Local History Society's annual journal *The New Regard*; work by David Adams and Chris Nancollas (2012) on Morse, and Adams (2016) on Wickenden; search and access to original works online (via Google Books, for example); online antiquarian book sales; through the research and curation of such websites as Edward Hunt's Forest of Dean

Miscellany; and the work of the Reading the Forest project (a public engagement project resulting from the research work for this thesis[1]). And yet…

This writing, set in or describing the Forest of Dean, has never before been considered as a whole, never before been considered as a literature of place, a literature of the Forest of Dean, and many of its authors have remained entirely hidden from academic interest, analysis, and evaluation. Some of its higher profile authors, such as Harvey, Potter, and Foley, have been recognised and studied individually for their contributions as, respectively, war poet, television dramatist, working-class and female memoirist; but their work has never been considered in relation to each other, nor for that matter in relation to the very many other, unrecognised or forgotten, authors of Forest of Dean literature. It is these gaps in scholarship that this research and thesis seeks to remedy. The fundamental aim of this research is to identify and reveal this Forest of Dean literature; begin to establish its history; identify and analyse some of the common themes and stories that emerge; and begin to trace their origin and development. Whilst the focus of this research is unapologetically directed at the Forest of Dean, it is also seeks to make a contribution to national literary and cultural history too.

Research Approach

This thesis takes inspiration from David Matless' 1994 essay 'Doing the English Village, 1945-90: An Essay in Imaginative Geography', in particular

[1] Shortly after beginning research for this thesis an opportunity arose to contribute to the development of a funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership programme. A proposal for a Forest of Dean literature research and public engagement project was submitted by the author of this thesis as Principal Investigator on behalf of the University of Gloucestershire, and shortly afterwards the project was joined by historian (subsequently Dr) Roger Deeks as project Co-Director and who helped develop the project further. As part of the overall Foresters' Forest programme, led by Forestry Commission England, Reading the Forest is one of the thirty eight projects operating since 2015 and due to complete in 2022. As well as creating opportunities to share research (including for this thesis) through public exhibitions, a new website, social media, two public murals, and local and regional BBC broadcasts, the project has also recruited local volunteer researchers. The role of the project's Co-Director Dr Roger Deeks, and that of many volunteers, has been vital in regard to the success of the project, and where their work has directly informed the specific research for this thesis it has been appropriately acknowledged.

regarding his stated aim 'to take seriously', the often 'mythic' (7), idea of the English village. In describing it as a 'mythic figure', and consisting of 'imagined realities', he treats them nonetheless as 'things real […] and of importance in the culture of the country' (8). This thesis similarly approaches the Forest of Dean as a place as expressed in its literature, as often mythic but, too, takes them seriously as cultural figures nonetheless, and recognises their importance. Matless described his as a project that was aimed at creating 'an initial genealogy of part of English culture' (10). Similarly, this thesis seeks to create an initial genealogy of Forest of Dean literature, and how it has described the cultural figure of the Forest of Dean and its inhabitants. The aim is to identify its literary DNA and trace its transference, modification, and inheritances across the generations of Forest of Dean literature. To read Forest of Dean literature is to read a version of the Forest of Dean, a Forest that is culturally constituted as a place and expressed through its literature. In reading Forest of Dean literature it might be said that one is then *reading the Forest* itself.

The genesis of this research might be traced to a question about the Forest of Dean as a place, and what might distinguish it as different from any other. This research has sought answers from within Forest of Dean literature, in its powerful images, ideas, and stories about the Forest of Dean and its inhabitants. Some of these are stubbornly persistent and often possess significant cultural currency to this day, both within and beyond the Forest of Dean. At a recent public engagement event, for example, a local resident commented that whilst playing an away rugby fixture the opposing team taunted the Forest team with the name 'the bear killers'[2], a reference to events that happened in 1889! This thesis seeks to trace how these Forest tropes have persisted through its literature.

The working definition of Forest of Dean literature within this thesis is deliberately loose in regard to forms, such that it includes works of poetry, prose, narrative, drama, and history, as well as journalistic social enquiry. It is

[2] This refers to the notorious killing of the bears, as examined in Chapter Three of this thesis. The comment was made to the author at the Reading the Forest stand at the Forest Showcase at Speech House on October 6th 2019.

writing that is about or is set in the Forest of Dean, and thus makes a contribution to the cultural figure of the Forest. A full, detailed history of Forest of Dean literature could never fall within the scope of this study, (there are simply too many authors and too many books), rather the ambition has been to create an *initial* history, and analysis; both being necessitated by the current gap in scholarship. This thesis then has been highly selective in regard to the work it analyses. The authors chosen for particularly detailed attention have been so for what has been judged to be their significance within Forest of Dean literature's development. Their work, and others', have been selected because of its analytical potential as examples of Forest of Dean literature, and/or their significance in the history of its development.

At the beginning of this research the intention was to begin the study at 1858, the date of Nicholls' first history of the Forest of Dean. It soon became apparent, however, that the work of poet Catherine Drew in 1841 was not simply an outlier but instead one of several Forest literary works that pre-dated Nicholls in beginning to describe a distinctive Forest of Dean. Further research revealed that, whilst the authors of these works might be considered the first authors of Forest of Dean literature, some of the ideas they expressed about the Forest were to be found in far earlier general works (such as national topographies) that mentioned the Forest of Dean (these works also acting as sources later on for Nicholls). Creating an initial genealogy of Forest of Dean literature has thus necessitated a tracing of its ancestry to before 1858, and indeed before the earlier Forest authors of that century, ultimately looking for its literary DNA amongst the early-modern descriptions of the Forest.

In locating Forest of Dean literature historically, this thesis structures that chronology, on the whole, around its key authors, by way of providing a temporal anchor, and also by way of recognising their significant role.

A Literature of Place

This research is a study of a literature of place, specifically the Forest of Dean, and it draws broadly on the discourse of place from within the field of

cultural geography. Though not ignoring the role and influence of landscape, this thesis is deliberate in its use of the term place, a distinction succinctly captured by Richard Muir:

> Places have no meanings other than those that humans give them. Landscapes are, to greater or lesser extents, the creations of humans, but if humans had never arrived and modified them the landscapes would be very different yet they would *still* exist as landscapes.
> (Muir, 1999, 294)

As cultural geographers Oakes and Price further elucidate, place consists of 'space infused with meaning' (Oakes and Price, 2008, 254). Forest of Dean literature both draws on, reinforces, and contributes to these place meanings in regard to the Forest. This thesis will argue that what emerges from Forest of Dean literature is its ongoing attempt to describe the very specificity of it as a place, its 'local distinctiveness', something that, in the Forest or anywhere else, is 'a compound thing and a messy one' (Clifford and King, 1993, 11). This sometimes difficult task, describing a place and a local culture, arguably makes for a rich literary seam to be explored. This thesis seeks to reveal and make some sense of this compound and messy thing.

Not Just the Countryside

This thesis starts from a position that existing discursive categories of rural or countryside, are too poor a fit to describe the specificity of the Forest of Dean. Similarly, Forest of Dean literature cannot be sufficiently described as simply rural or countryside writing.

Discourses of the rural, too often predicated on the synonymy of countryside with agriculture[3], or the country estate, do not adequately describe the Forest of Dean. Raymond Williams' landmark analysis of the very idea of the

[3] A survey of the online page *Recent Journal of Rural Studies Articles* (Elsevier, 2017), for example, shows 28 of the 59 article titles alone including the words 'agriculture', 'farming', or 'food'. Farming (small-scale or industrial, in decline or diversification) has been considered definitional of the countryside.

countryside, (and the city), in literature, *The Country and the City* (1993, first published in 1973), for all of its exposure that these ideas obscured material social reality, still talked of the countryside as primarily the site of agricultural production, and/or the landed estate. The rural as a discursive category has come under further scrutiny more recently (see for example Halfacree, 1993; Jones, 1995), and in 1994 Paul Cloke and Nigel Thrift had noted that the then current phase of rural studies itself was developing a recognition of the 'complexities, ambiguities and ambivalences of the rural' (Cloke and Thrift, 1994, 3). Notwithstanding this, rural or countryside as categories remain a poor fit for the Forest of Dean, and rural or countryside writing for its literature. There are several factors that distinguish it as a place from conventional notions of the countryside: Apart from common grazing on forest wastes as a secondary activity, agriculture in the Forest has been limited to small farms mostly located on its fringes; historically, apart from the crown itself, there have been relatively few large private land owners or country estates in the Forest; though its status as a royal hunting reserve notionally restricted access to it, the value of its iron, and later coal, in reality meant that it has long been a place of settlement and industrial activity and its people have jealously defended the rights granted them to do this. The Forest is then a poor fit as either agriculture or squire-owned countryside. With the growth of its industry and towns limited by the need to preserve its woodlands[4], it has never been completely given over to industry and settlement, so it has not developed into an urban area either.

This distinctiveness of the Forest of Dean was in recent years acknowledged in a 2006 report for the South West Regional Development Agency that stated that 'The landscape of the District is highly distinctive' (Land Use Consultants, 2006, 5), and the same report cited Frank Dobson who (at the time was Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment) on a visit to the Forest in 1999 had committed to designate the area with '"a new custom built special status appropriate to its unique history and character"'(7). It is the contention

[4] As a source of timber for the Navy to build its ships, later as a resource for coal mining (pit props), then as National Forest Park. Today as natural capital and means of carbon sequestration (Forestry England, 2019, 12).

of this thesis that it is this 'unique history and character', this distinctiveness, that much of Forest of Dean literature is seeking to express. The lack of fit of the Forest of Dean to the category of countryside was neatly encapsulated by a young Dennis Potter in an unpublished, and unfinished, early attempt at a novel as his young character, recently moved to London seeks to explain to those taunting him in the school playground:

> He came from a hilly, green and lovely certainly, yet coalmining part of England, on the borders of Wales. The Forest, the land on its own. Not just "the country".
> (Potter, n.d., cited in Carpenter, 1998, 87)

If the Forest of Dean demands its own definition as a place, so too does its literature as writing that describes that place. This research study seeks to provide that specificity by considering it largely on its own terms as a Forest of Dean literature.

Locating the Forest

The Forest of Dean is a region on the western edge of Gloucestershire, the border with Wales to its west. It is neatly delineated by the River Severn on its eastern side, and the River Wye on its west. Whilst its southern border is marked by the confluence of the two rivers into the Severn Estuary, its northern extremity is more diffuse depending on which definition of the Forest of Dean is used and at which period. The current Forest of Dean District Council area, for example, stretches as far northward as the edge of the Malvern Hills, although such northern extremities would rarely be considered to be part of 'the Forest'. Whilst excluding literary work from the northern, rural extremities of the region,

for example that of the Dymock Poets[5], this research and thesis chooses to be deliberately vague in regard to a precise geographical definition of the Forest beyond a general sense that it sits between the Severn and Wye. Anchored though it is in a very real, corporal place, the Forest of Dean in this thesis is treated as much as an idea, a discursive category, a cultural signifier, as it is a definitively delineated geographical territory. It is this 'the Forest'[6] that the research for this thesis has sought to uncover and come to an understanding of through revealing and exploring Forest of Dean literature.

The Forest as the place in general, and interchangeable with *the Forest of Dean*, is to be distinguished from *the forest* [lower case] meaning either its woodlands or its afforested lands (otherwise known as the statutory forest).

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is broadly divided into two parts (Chapters 1-3, and 4-5). The first part focuses primarily on establishing a history of Forest of Dean literature and analysing aspects of it that are tied more closely to its specific historic period. The second part focuses on analysis of key shared aspects of the literature across its history.

Chapter One traces the early-modern literary origins of some of the most persistent tropes that appear in Forest of Dean literature in regard to its people and place. It argues that the nature of, and impetus behind, these Tudor and Stuart chorographies, and early travel writing, influence how the Forest is portrayed in them. It reveals how these characterisations of the Forest were often copied from one to another and subsequently made their way into the early county histories, thence into the work of the Forest's historian H. G.

[5] The Dymock Poets do not fall within the scope of this thesis. As both a group and individually they have already received significant scholarly attention (see dymockpoets.org online for a bibliography). Brian Waters did briefly mention the group in his *The Forest of Dean*, whilst being fairly dismissive in regard to their connection to the Forest, for example his assessment of Robert Frost was that 'The poet's failure to understand the English character hastened his departure' (Waters, 1951, 112).

[6] An early example of the local use of simply 'the Forest', as opposed to the more formal 'Forest of Dean', can be found in the Coleford Parish Magazine in 1877: 'At the meeting at the Speech House, on Wednesday, November 14, and which was attended by everyone of influence in the Forest, who was able to […]' (*Coleford Parish Magazine*, 1877)

Nicholls. Whilst this earlier work often acted as direct source material and inspiration, Nicholls' 1858 work *The Forest of Dean*, helped perpetuate these early characterisations of the Forest and provide accessible source material for authors of Forest of Dean literature in the latter nineteenth century, and with its republication in 1966 on into the latter part of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two introduces the first literary works that might be described as Forest of Dean literature. It explores the work of four Forest authors of the first half of the nineteenth century: William Wickenden, Richard Morse, Catherine Drew, and Phillip Ducarel. It examines to what extent their work draws on generic literary ideas about forests in general as described in Chapter One, and how far each of them began to describe a specific and distinctive Forest of Dean. The first example of Forest of Dean dialect in literature is examined in the context of wider cultural developments, as well as other examples of its use in the century.

Chapter Three describes a history of Forest of Dean literature in the twentieth century, and in seeking to demonstrate connections across the period is of greater length. It focuses in some detail on the authors F. W. Harvey, Harry Beddington, and Winifred Foley. Harvey will be shown to have had an important role, in particular through his radio broadcasts, in shaping the image of the Forest for much of the remainder of the century. Work newly rediscovered during the course of the research for this thesis by Harry Beddington, will reveal the role the Forest's amateur drama scene played in the development of his writing. Local smoking concerts and other opportunities for performance will also be shown to have played an important role in the development of Forest of Dean literature in this period. In regard to Foley, access to archival material previously unexamined by scholars will challenge the current narrative of her beginnings as an author, and will demonstrate that she was in reality a dedicated and determined writer long before the publication of *A Child in the Forest* (1974). The chapter also uncovers the work of other Forest authors in order to locate these three within the local, and national, literary and cultural context. Dennis Potter's work *The Changing Forest* (1962), provides additional valuable

context in this regard. The use of dialect in Forest of Dean literature of the twentieth century is also examined, and in partiuclar Beddington's use of it. The chapter concludes by identifying how, as the century progressed, Forest of Dean literature began to describe an increasingly mythologised, spectral, Forest of Dean of the past, and assesses to what extent this was purely nostalgic.

Chapter Four interrogates the notion of the Forest of Dean as geographically and culturally isolated. It challenges the idea that the region has ever truly been cut off, and asks why then the myth of isolation has such currency, in particular in the second half of the twentieth century. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic (Hall, et al, 2013, 225), and Fredrick Barth's writing on boundaries (Barth, 1969; 2000), this chapter argues that Forest of Dean literature is often concerned with reinforcing conceptual boundaries of the Forest as a means of establishing and reinforcing its discursive and cultural territory. With reference to the work of Simon Sandall (2013), the chapter reveals too the historical economic imperatives for maintaining a distinctive territorial boundary.

Chapter Five argues that much of Forest of Dean literature challenges the conventional centre-periphery model in which so-called regional literature is defined and valued in relation to the geographical and cultural urban centre. It suggests that Forest of Dean literature assumes the Forest is centre, elsewhere being *its* geographical and cultural periphery. Whilst some examples of Forest of Dean literature replicate notions of forests as liminal spaces (places outside the norms of society and spaces allowing personal transformation), it will be shown how much of Forest of Dean literature instead assumes the Forest as normality, with the city taking on the role and position of the liminal. The chapter concludes, in reference to Laura Mulvey's (1975), and subsequent iterations of, gaze theory, with the proposal that a distinctive Forest gaze is to be found at work in much Forest of Dean literature.

Chapter 1.

Tracing the Literary Origins of the Forest of Dean

so very dark and terrible by reason of its shades and
cross-ways; that it rendred the Inhabitants barbarous,
and embolden'd them to commit many outrages.
(Gibson, 1722, 269)

"'tis a wild race that lives there, strange devil miners
who spend their lives delving deep in the earth for iron
and coal"
(Weenolsen, 1958, 134)

Whilst the first Forest of Dean literature can be traced to the beginning of the nineteenth century, long before that the Forest of Dean had received some literary attention. Rather than playing a central role in these earlier works, the Forest appeared only as one of many entries in books about Britain as a whole, as a stop on the route of early travel writers, or as part of the early county histories of Gloucestershire. In this earlier writing the Forest is only one of the many places being written about, a small part of much larger literary endeavours. These earlier accounts of the Forest of Dean will be the main focus of this chapter. The reason for exploring these is twofold: firstly they constitute the early chronology of literary portrayals of the Forest; secondly, and more significantly, they suggest an earlier literary source for many of the recurring tropes in Forest of Dean literature in regard to the Forest. In these earlier works can be found expressions of the Forest as a place of wild people, a place and people beyond civilisation, the people and their behaviour shaped by the very landscape in which they live. These early portrayals of the Forest include an emphasis on its boundaries too, in particular its eastern and western boundaries

marked out by the rivers Severn and Wye. They note its growing industry, particularly iron extraction and production, and the impact this was having on its woodland cover. Whilst such images of the Forest may not always have been *directly* drawn from these texts by the later authors of Forest of Dean literature, evidence suggests that they are likely to have been picked up by their inclusion in the work of the Forest of Dean historian the Reverend H. G. Nicholls.

Nicholls' works, *The Forest of Dean* (1858), and *The Personalities of the Forest of Dean* (1863), became accessible sources of history and socio-cultural background for future writers of both fiction and prose about, or set in, the Forest of Dean. Indeed, with the re-publication of his 1858 work (in a volume that included his third Forest book, *Iron Making in the Olden Times: as instanced in the ancient mines, forges, and furnaces of the Forest of Dean*, originally published in 1866) just over a century later in 1966, his work once again became an easily available source for any writer seeking to understand the history and identity of the Forest. Today, with his work freely available online, his 1858 work remains arguably the best *general* history of the Forest up to that date.

Where Nicholls exclusively focused his writing on the Forest, and was living here at the time, the earlier accounts of the Forest were only part of more general works such as national chorographies, British travelogues, and early county histories. In these the Forest features as just a tiny fragment of a national picture, a detour from the Wye Tour or a place worthy of a day's delay on route, or one small part making up the whole county of Gloucestershire. They are also produced by people from outside of the Forest: poets and historians drawing on previous accounts, documentation, and sometimes archaeological evidence; visitors passing through the Forest seeking the picturesque, or the red glow of the latest industrial technology. Where Nicholls was writing from a vantage point within the Forest, both spatially and culturally, (he lived in the Forest and worked within the Forest community), the writers of the early accounts were writing from an external perspective.

In exploring these earlier accounts of the Forest is to read about a place of trees yes, but also a place of mineral extraction and industrial production. The

trees themselves are also a raw material for naval construction. Here too are some of the sources of the image of the Forest's inhabitants as a recalcitrant and sometimes lawless, wild people, ideas whose persistence and pervasiveness can be seen throughout nineteenth and twentieth-century writing on the Forest, and persist right up to the present day. A recent example, albeit not a literary one, of the continued currency of this image of the Forest could be heard on an episode of BBC Radio 4's series of walking programmes, *Ramblings*. This edition brought presenter Claire Balding on a walk along the eastern shore of the River Severn. She asked her interviewee what the hills she could see on the other side of the river where: 'that's the Forest of Dean over there: the wild land' (*Ramblings*, 2018).

This chapter then seeks to trace the lineage of some of these persistent characterisations of the area, and the original historical and literary contexts in which they arose. Whilst a more extensive and detailed examination of these earlier presentations of the Forest of Dean may be fertile ground for future scholarship, at this present time the aim here is to trace the roots of Forest literary genealogy as an historical introduction to the main periods of interest in this thesis.

Local Histories, Antiquarians and Travel Writing

John Beckett (2014), suggests that the writing of local history in Britain might ultimately be traced back to Bede in the eighth century, or to the later William of Malmesbury's *History of the Prelates of England*, in 1125. The first historically descriptive works of the early-modern period, writes Beckett, were being written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These were referred to as *chorographies* – studies of places – using documentary sources and artefacts to tell the story of a Britain rooted in antiquity. Beckett describes these works as part of a developing humanist scholarship, the aim of which was to find out about and record the past. These histories were also, in part, a response to the need during the reformation to establish a British church and nation state

independent of the papal church in Rome. Their aim was to create a national story that could be traced to independent roots and legitimacy in antiquity. At the same time these early-modern historians were concerned about the preservation of local records against a background of destruction during the dissolution of the monasteries. The Society of Antiquaries was founded in 1572, and though dissolved by James I, it continued to exist out of the public eye, reflecting scholars developing interest in the remains of classical antiquity in the British Isles. It was revived as a more formal society early in the eighteenth century before becoming incorporated under charter in 1751 as Society of Antiquaries of London (Hume, 1847, 74-5). Once again, the study of Britain's past was in part a response to contemporary political developments. Rosemary Sweet links the revival of the Society to the Act of Union of 1707 and the Hanoverian succession. Both of these, she argues, 'gave added impetus to the study of a common British past as a means of consolidating political stability' (Sweet, n.d.a., 1-2). Sweet also points out that the writers, or in many cases compilers of (many vast collections never made it into publication or even an organized draft), local history were often as much interested in the present details of places and landscape as they were in historical details and antiquarian artifacts. Though motivations varied, they were sometimes driven by a desire to establish the lineage of property ownership for their county's landed elites (as will be seen this appears to be the motivation in at least one of the county historians of Gloucestershire).

Another motivation for writing about Britain's places and landscape was that of travel, and travel writing. Esther Moir in *The Discovery of Britain: The English Tourists 1540-1840* (1964), distinguishes these as individuals travelling for its own sake, rather than solely for trade, or religious pilgrimage. She describes the concept of the Tour of Britain itself having its origins in the early sixteenth century. With better roads and improved methods of cartography making travel easier, travel writers were motivated by a sense of pride in the greatness of Tudor England and shear curiosity in its historic origins. From antiquities to contemporary industry, their aim in writing was to present a

'Speculum Britanniae, a looking glass of Britain' (Moir, 1964, xiv). By the mid eighteenth century, with improved knowledge and wider access to printed books and journals, there was the possibility to follow a specialist interest such as antiquities alone or, inspired by William Gilpin, travel in search of the picturesque. Far from a tour of Britain being the reserve only of those without the means to take the European Grand Tour, Moir describes a level of unease developing that, regardless of the differing expense, would rather anyway see the nation's young men exploring their native Britain than be exposed to the moral temptations, dissipation and distraction of the Latin continent (2-3). This view, and much later the disruption caused by Napoleonic conflicts in Europe, would see the rise in popularity of British tours, such as the Wye Tour. The route travelling down the River Wye brought many travellers, writers and artists within reach of the Forest of Dean, among them Gilpin himself in 1770, Wordsworth in 1798, and, reputedly, around the same period the painter J. M. W. Turner (Wilton, 2012). These were though merely a later part of a long history of writers dating back to the sixteenth century for whom the Forest was just one stop on their tour, one fragment of much larger literary projects.

Britannia and the Forest of Dean

When William Camden's *Britannia*, was first published in 1586, the Forest had already been delineated and set aside as a Royal Forest for around five hundred years, (since the time of William I), and possibly even longer, since the earlier Anglo-Saxon period (Hart, 1966, 7). Though its exact administrative boundaries would vary, especially in the north of the region, its eastern and western extents were neatly bounded by the rivers Severn and Wye. It was a named and bounded region, the Forest of Dean, and it was already well known by the sixteenth century as a source of iron extraction and manufacture, its forges also utilising the large deposits of cinders left over from the Roman period. It was also seen as an important store, if not necessarily a resource much drawn upon, of Naval timber. The Forest of Dean was then a distinctive, defined and named region rather than simply western-Gloucestershire. Camden

describes (here in translation, the original being written in Latin), this land between the Severn and Wye as 'all cov'rd with thick Woods, and at this day is call'd *Dean-Forest*' (Gibson, 1722, 269). He continues:

> This formerly was so thick with Trees, so very dark and terrible by reason of its shades and cross-ways; that it rendred the Inhabitants barbarous, and embolden'd them to commit many outrages. For, in the reign of *Henry* the sixth, they so annoy'd the banks of the *Severne* with their Robberies, that there was an Act of Parliament made on purpose to curb and refrain them. But, since so many rich veins of Iron have been dicover'd here abouts, those thick Woods by degrees are become much thinner. (Gibson, 1722, 269)

Camden's summation of the Forest is at once both generic, in its motif of the un-civilising effect of living in woodland, and specific in its reference to historical incidents and contemporary economy. The Act of Parliament referred to, passed during the reign of Henry VI, was in fact passed in response to harassment of river barges by the Welsh: it was only later in 1503 that a further act was passed, this time in specific response to 'divers misruled persons inhabiting the Forest of Dean' (Davies, 1871, 408). Exact historical precision aside, the reference to an act of Parliament serves to re-enforce both the significance of the attacks and to set up a binary opposition between central government and this unruly region needing to be restrained, a recurring trope in Forest of Dean literature. In amongst the trees, the dark forest, starved of actual and metaphorical light, is engendered barbarity and lawlessness. Woodland here is the antithesis of city or town civilisation as the right dwelling place of humane man in his man-made de-natured environment. The forest is instead dark and malign nature, a 'realm of opacity', as Robert Pogue Harrison describes it, a place in which civilisation can 'project into the forest's shadows its secret innermost anxieties' (Harrison, 1993, xi). In contrast to the dark forest the River Severn, wide and open in its lower reaches, subject to the moral hygiene of daylight, is visible, clear and open to the sight of the writer and his reader, free from the corrupting influence of the forest's darkness, not a place

of ‘shades and crossways’. This image of forests in general, applied to the Forest of Dean, was a familiar one at the time Camden was writing, with long-established literary and cultural antecedents. In *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (1993), Harrison traces this association of forests with barbarity back to the early middle ages. Forests, argues Harrison, represented to the Church the ‘underside of the ordained world’, the ‘last strongholds of pagan worship’, allowing ‘popular memory to preserve cultural continuities with the pagan past’ (61-62). Nature itself was associated with the old animistic religions, Druidic[7] practices, nature as the darker animal instincts of mankind. Forests were seen as beyond the control of the newly powerful institutions of the feudal and religious state.

This is not to say that for Camden, writing in the sixteenth century, the association of forests with lawlessness was not rooted in real incidents, some within then recent history, as much as it was in philosophical, fictional and poetic conceptions of nature. There were indeed the Forester’s raids on Severn barges, and, as Peter J. Neville Havins recounts, there was a long history in England more widely of real forest outlaws[8] (Havins, 1976, 73-79).

Forests in general then had long been associated with lawlessness, with some justification, although at the same time, in contradiction, in theory they were highly regulated spaces with their own laws and officials (Harrison, 1993, Ch2). Forests in England had been subject to specific regulation since at least the time of Cnut, and the amount of forested land expanded under William I (Hart, 1971a, 19). Though punishments for infringements of forest laws were relaxed (relatively) in the Forest Charter of 1217 (Hart, 1971a, 22), forests, including the Forest of Dean, remained under a raft of specific regulations many of which

[7] Nicholls himself would claim that a geological feature the Forest of Dean was evidence, ‘that the Druids had appropriated it to sacrificial purposes’ (Nicholls, 1858, 2)

[8] Such as: ‘Eadric the Wild, or “Eadric of the Woodland”’, who until his capture in 1070 had fought against the Norman invasion taking refuge in the woodlands of Shropshire; Malcom Musard and his gang in the early 1300’s operating out of Feckenham Forest; Piers Veneables of Derbyshire active in the 1430’s and described in one contemporary account as behaving like, ‘“Robyn Hode and his maynee”’ (Havins, 1976, 73-79). Havins also cites the book, *Fraternity of the Vagabond,* by John Audley published in 1561, only a few years before Camden’s own work, in which the term, ‘the ruffmans’ is used to describe the woodland refuges of ‘rufflers’, in effect highway robbers operating from forest hideouts (Havins, 1976, 91).

continue in the Forest of Dean to this day. With the increasing importance of the Forest of Dean as a source of raw materials and industrial manufacture in the early-modern period, it would come under ever closer scrutiny and greater administrative attention. Simon Sandall (Sandall, 2009, 12-23) describes the period 1560-1680 in the Forest of Dean as not only a period of increasingly intensive industrial activity, but also of social change as in migration increased and diversified the population. It was a period in which the legitimacy of customary rights and practices (in regard to mining, timber, and grazing) began to be challenged by those seeking exclusivity in their exploitation of the Forest's mineral and timber resources. These changes met local opposition, Sharp (Sharp, 2010, 124) describing for example how in 1594 local inhabitants in the Forest of Dean threatened men sent to cut timber for the crown, eventually destroying the felled wood so that it could not be used. Under James I then Charles I the crown sought to reassert and better monetize its rights to forest lands and resources through the sale of leases to individuals (Hart, 1966, 86-131; Sandall, 2009, 77-83; Sharp, 2010, 113) and latterly large enclosures for the protection of timber against felling (Hart, 1966, 107). This impingement on longstanding local customs, and thus local inhabitants' means of economic sustainability, lead to increased civil unrest and riots in the Forest during the early decades of the seventeenth century. There was then some justification, as well as literary convention, for the description of forest inhabitants, and those of the Forest of Dean in particular as a lawless and recalcitrant people.

The image of forests as places hiding outlaws or other people seeking refuge remained a wide-spread convention at the time Camden was writing. Forests in general were seen as symbolic of wilderness, barren in terms of being agriculturally unproductive, lacking in civilisation and in contravention of progress and civilised humanity (Thomas, 1983, 285).

In tracing the early-modern origins of later ideas about the Forest of Dean, Camden's *Britannia* is significant in that it directly influences later works, including Michael Drayton's *Poly Olbion*, of 1612 (Hadfield, 2004, 138). Camden's description of the Forest is clearly influencing Drayton's, albeit more

mythical, poetic and lengthy depiction in his epic poem. The river once again is the route by which the Forest is reached by the reader and a position from without the forest from which to view it:

> Here (Queene of Forrests all, that West of *Severne* lie)
> Her broad and bushie top *Deane* holdeth up so hie,
> The lesser are not seene, shee is so tall and large.
> And standing in such state upon the winding marge,
> Within her hollow woods the *Satyres* that did wonne
> In gloomie secret shades, not pierc't with Sommers sunne,
> Under a false pretence the Nymphs to entertaine,
> Oft ravished the choice of *Sabrins* watry traine;
> And from their Mistris banks them taking as a prey,
> Unto their wooddie Caves have carried them away:
> Then from her inner Groves for succour when they cri'd,
> Shee retchlesse of their wrongs (her *Satyres* scapes to hide)
> Unto their just complaint not once her eare enclines:
> So fruitfull in her Woods, and wealthy in her Mines,
> (Drayton, 1612, lines 29-42)

Once again the incident of the attacks on River Severn traffic is described, though here portrayed through the devices of classical mythology, the raiders represented by Drayton as 'Satyres'. These half-man half-animal creatures were classical forest-dwelling symbols of misrule, and Drayton here may have been drawing specifically on satyres' connections with caves in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (March, 2014, 435). They are a succinct device for portraying the resident Foresters as once again beyond the realm of civilisation, beyond the norms of society. Camden's 'shades and crossways', become 'gloomie secret shades not pierced with Sommer sunne'. Once again the identification of people with place, landscape and environment is made, the people shaped by the very aspect of their lived environment. In contrast to the first authors of Forest of Dean literature, all of whom intimately knew the Forest, these are writers from without, with little or no familiarity with the lives of those they are describing,

their purpose to mythologise a history of the national landscape, not to describe the intimacies of lives lived in the Forest.

In the same passage Drayton also refers to the Forest's industry: 'So fruitfull in her Woods, and wealthy in her Mines'. The Forest in Drayton's account is a place of woods, a place of iron, as well as a place of lawless natives. The influence of Camden seems clear, however it may in fact have been an even earlier writer that acted as Drayton's and indeed Camden's source. John Leland, who is said to have visited the Forest in 1540 (Litzenberger, 2002, 10) for his own earlier *Britannia* project commissioned by Henry VIII, wrote that '"The ground is fruitful of iron mines, and divers forges be there to make iron'" (Hearne, 1769 cited in Litzenbrger, 2002, 83). Although not published in full until much later, Leland's extensive notes were known to have been copied and circulated widely amongst writers of the time (Moir, 1964, 16-17) so it is possible that Camden was himself already drawing his themes for the Forest of Dean from the earlier writer.

The impact of the iron industry in the Forest (active since the Roman period[9], and possibly before) on its woodland had been noted as early as the thirteenth century (Hart, 1966, 48). With the introduction of blast furnaces to the region in the latter half of the sixteenth century (Hart, ch1, 1971b), the period in which Camden was writing, the increased levels of iron manufacture and their demand for more charcoal was seen to be increasing the rate of destruction of the Forest's woodland cover. Although the immediate visual impact of this industry in action, including trees being felled and consumed for charcoal or other uses such as construction, would have created a compelling narrative, the actual longer-term impact on the Forest's total tree cover during this period may in itself have been less immediately significant. Cyril Hart argues that much of the concern may have been generated by a paucity of easily

[9] Camden himself suggests as such in describing the discovery of a Roman altar dedicated to Jupiter at Caerleon: 'It seems probable, that this Altar was erected to implore his Tuition of some Iron Mines, either in the Forest of Dean or some other place of this Country' (Gibon, 1722, 721). Hart (1971b, 1) refers to conclusive archaeological evidence of Roman period iron mines in the Forest.

accessible timber (Hart, 1971b, 85), rather than reduction in total tree cover as such. It has also been argued that heavy usage of timber actually led to better management and administration of woodland precisely in order to utilise it in future in the iron industry (Thomas, 1984, 284-6). By the time of Lieutenant Hammond's journey through England in 1634 blast furnace technology was beginning to be well established across the Forest of Dean, and its impact on the Forest's timber was duly noted:

> In that Afternoone we trauell'd through part of the famousest and best wooded Forrest in all England, which lately hath beene much cropt, lying between those two sweet Streames.
> (Whickham Legg, 1904, 84)

Again, here is the mention of the Forest defined east and west by its two rivers. Hammond's comments regarding the cropping of its trees repeats a familiar refrain whilst he also acknowledges that it is one of the 'best wooded' in the country. This, and its expanding industrial output, seems to account for Hammond's description too of it as 'the famousest' of forests.

The Forest as a Place of Fame

The idea of the Forest as a place of fame ('famousest' in Hammond's words) suggests that it was well known far beyond the banks of the Severn and Wye: as Drayton says it was 'Queene of Forrests all'. Just a few decades later in the work of Abraham Cowley the notion of the Forest's fame is again referred to. His six-volume work *On Plants*, was published first in 1662 in Latin, though it was soon available in translation with several subsequent editions. Cowley's description of the Forest brought together many of the images produced by previous writers:

> There is an antient * Forest known to Fame,
> On this side sep'rate from the *Cambrian* Plain
> By Wandering *Wye*; whose winding Current glides,
> And murm'ring Leaves behind its flowry Sides.

On that, 'tis wash'd by nobler *Severn's* Streams,
Whose Beauties scarce will yield to famous *Thames*
Of yore 'twas *Areden* call'd, but that great Name,
As like her self, diminish'd into *Dean.*
The cursed Weapons of destructive War,
In all their Cruelties have made her share;
The Iron has its noblest Shades destroy'd;
And so unhappy 'tis as it presents,
Of its own Death the fatal instruments.
*The Forest of Dean

With Industry its Ruin to improve,
Bears Minerals below, and Trees above.
Oh Poverty! thou Happiness extreme,
When no afflicting Want can intervene)
And oh! Thou subtle Treasure of the Earth,
From whence all Rapes and Mischiefs take their Birth,
And you, triumphing Woods, secur'd from Spoil,
By the safe Blessing of your barren Soil.
Here, unconsum'd, how small a part remains
Of that rich Store that once adorn'd the Plains;
Yet that small part that has escap'd the Ire
Of lawless steel, and avaritious Fire,
By many Nymphs and Deities possest,
Of all the *British* Shades continues still the best.
(Cowley & Sprat, 1708, 450-51)

Cowley's description again includes the concern over industry's impact on the woods, their very soil the source of the raw materials used to create the implements of its own destruction[10]. These materials were also used in the manufacture of 'cursed Weapons of destructive War', particularly resonant with a readership remembering the recent civil wars of 1642-51. A time of national political and social upheaval the control of the Forest of Dean was of particular regional value during the conflict because of the potential of its resources and manufacturing capabilities in regard to military ordinance. The furnace at Soudley, for example, is said to have provided 400 cannon balls for the Royalist siege of near-by Gloucester (Webb, 2001, 15).

[10] An image that would resurface in the twentieth century in the poem 'Devil's Chapel' (Harvey, 2017 first published 1926) by F. W. Harvey (see Chapter Three).

The Forest of Dean 'a place of fame', here, despite the destruction caused by the very iron that it's soil has given up, remains 'still the best'. The Forest of Dean is clearly regarded as a significant place, and a significant forest. For Cowley the 'shades' (the wooded cover, the trees) are not those of Camden 'dark and terrible', but instead are 'noblest shades', trees here as noble, innocent nature. Cowley demonstrates a reverence for trees here - he would later study botany at Oxford (Lindsay, 2004) - as aspects of nature in opposition to encroaching industry. Rather than the realm of strange Druidic practices, or rampant mythical beasts, this is the forest home of far more benevolent 'Nymphs and Deities'. Nature here is differentiated from the greed and destruction of mankind prompted by the exploitation of its inherent wealth in its minerals and timber. The trees here are both a 'rich Store', the precious remains of a once much wider woodland that stretched across the country, and at the same time a valuable store of a potential material resource. Cowley introduces, for what appears to be the first time, a sense of appreciation for nature in its own right, whilst also encapsulating the complexities and tensions inherent in the Forest between the value of its trees as store of timber and the demands of its expanding iron industry on them for fuel.

Over a century later again, the Forest's fame is mentioned when John Byng the Viscount Torrington, on his travels around the nation, wrote of his route through the Forest of Dean. In his entry for 15th June 1781 he describes approaching the Forest from Gloucester through Mitcheldean '"and here the Forest of Dean begins, which I am anxious to see (as a place of Fame) and was one principal object of my ride. It fully answered my hopes"' (Byng, 1781 cited in Phelps, 1982, 9). Clearly Byng is not disappointed in what he finds, but an all too familiar lament follows: '"The woods are suffering and have suffered much lately from the axe"' (9), though now as he points out with the added problem of sheep grazing the young shoots too. Byng is replicating familiar themes of the Forest's woods being depleted due to the impact of industry and other human activity. Regardless of the reality or not of any increased rate of timber depletion, the sight for a traveller passing through of *any* trees having been

felled, and the visual impact of the red glow of industry at work nearby, would have created a strong visual image suggestive of man's domination over and destruction of nature. Byng describes the local men as either blackened by coal or reddened by iron ore and visiting a furnace at Redbrook he says he '"was well received by the devils who can bear the infernal heat"' (9). To read Byng's use of 'devils' as pejorative here would perhaps be unfair, instead they act to simply complete the metaphorical description of the furnace as 'infernal'. It is however tempting to trace its lineage here back to Camden's 'barbarous' Forest inhabitants or Drayton's 'satyres'. It is 'Devils' he chooses rather than, for example alchemists, or simply men. These are men who can not only bear the heat of the inferno but also the men that are in effect responsible for the destruction of the trees. Apart from these odd flourishes, and inheritances from earlier writers, Byng and Hammond are not bound by the poetic form in the same way as the work of Drayton or Cowley for example. Their purpose is instead one of accurate description of the topography and economy of the regions they were travelling through, gathering empirical evidence. Cowley, Drayton and Camden had instead been seeking to create a poetic vision of Britian, drawing on the motifs of the classical world to create the idea of an epic British kingdom.

Cowley, Drayton and Camden's work, poetic in form was propagandistic in nature, seeking to create a cohesive national story. England in the sixteenth century has been described as culturally and politically in a post-colonial phase (Mottram, 2007), liberated from the Roman church it was keen to emphasise its independent identity and history, as well as its own colonial ambitions firstly within the British Isles itself. These earlier works then were as much an attempt at national cohesion as they were an accurate geographical and historical portrayal of Britain. Where the later Byng and Hammond, and before them John Leland, were first-hand observers, Cowley, Drayton and Camden were often drawing on second hand accounts and older documentary sources (Moir, 1964, 24), and were less concerned with an accurate portrayal of the contemporary cultural and economic status of the country as they were with tracing the lineage

of the British peoples – in Camden's case even as far back as the biblical Noah (Beckett, 2007, 22). Moir describes Drayton's *Poly Olbion* as indeed ranging from 'a mere catalogue of the general characteristics of a county to flights of wildest fantasy' (1964, 25). This would contrast, in aspiration at least, with the work of travel writers such as Byng and Hammond, proudly (on the whole) documenting the technological developments of an increasingly industrialising nation, and also with the more scholarly county histories that would be written in the following century, with the Forest again featuring as part of these histories, in this case, of Gloucestershire.

The Forest in the First Gloucestershire County Histories

By the beginning of the eighteenth century scholarly county histories were beginning to be produced, those concerning Gloucestershire becoming direct sources of information about the Forest of Dean for Nicholls' own works specifically on the Forest. Aspiring to greater factual accuracy than in the preceding periods the first of these, Sir Robert Atkyns' *Ancient and Present State of Glostershire*, was published in 1712. He was a local JP and later MP for Gloucestershire with a residence in the county from around 1670 (Haines, 2004). His history draws heavily on records of property ownership, local ecclesiastical records, and descriptions of land holdings both historical and contemporary illustrating Sweet's contention (Sweet, n.d.b) that some of the impetus of such histories was reinforcing lineage of land ownership. Atkyns does also seem to have been in part inspired by the Doomsday Book as well as his work as Commissioner of Assessment for the county that similarly required an understanding of who owned which lands in order that they could be appropriately taxed (Pearsall, 2011). In his first paragraph he refers to 'Mr Camden' (Atkyns, 1712, 382), in regard to his theory on the source of 'Dean' as a name, then describes the various grants of land, and the forges in the area, as well as land seizures, in as much detail as he is able based on the records to hand. He describes the management and administration of the Forest including

the Mine Law Court as well as the 'divers Courts belonging to this Forest' (384), these being the Swainmote Court (presiding over the vert and venison) and the Miners' Court (presiding over coal and iron mining). Camden's description of the 'shades and crossways', and the barbarous inhabitants is again quoted. In a section attributed as 'Additions to Camden', Atkyns repeats the story of the supposed orders of the Spanish Armada to destroy the Forest due to its importance in Naval construction.[11] This anecdote is just one of several historical stories about the Forest that would persist and provide source material for fiction-writers well into the present day, often it seems via Nicholl's books on the Forest that brought many of them together in accessible volumes. Atkyns though at this point, his purpose being to cover the whole county, takes only four pages to cover the whole Forest of Dean.

If Atkyn's ambition had been to encompass as much history of the county as he had access to and an impression of the current state of Gloucestershire, Samuel Rudder's *A New History of Gloucestershire* (1779), was more ambitious in seeking, according to its title page, to include 'topography, antiquities, curiosities, produce, trade and manufactures', as well as 'foundation charters', with 'descriptions of the principal seats', and 'the history of every parish, tithing, and extraparochial place in the county' (iii, Rudder, 1779). Rudder, directly quoted by Nicholls in his work of 1858, seems a likely candidate in providing a blueprint for Nicholls' own wide-ranging and ambitious work on the history and contemporary state of the Forest of Dean: Rudder covering the whole county, Nicholls using the same idea but for the Forest alone. For each county parish Rudder draws on the Doomsday Book, updating it with the latest data regarding, for example, number of dwellings and population, and in this he often refers to Atkyns. In his opening summary of the three natural geographical divisions of

[11] Evelyn's account describes it thus: 'I have heard, that in the great expedition of 88, it was expresly enjoin'd the Spanish commanders of that signal Armada; that if when landed they should not be able to subdue our nation, and make good their conquest; they should yet be sure not to leave a tree standing in the Forest of Dean' unless the English should use them to build ships' (Evelyn, Nisbet, 1908, 145). Richard Deacon makes a strong case that the origin of this was Dr John Dee's decoding of so called angelic revelations, reported by him as agent to Elizabeth's government at the time (Deacon, 1968, 232).

the county (Cotswolds, Vale, Forest of Dean) Rudder states that forests have always been in the charge of 'persons of eminence', and that 'the Roman consuls had the government of forests' (27), thus suggesting a very long-standing historical legitimacy to forests as places to be administered under the authority of the crown. Rudder quotes both Camden and Drayton but goes into far more detail with over eleven double column pages regarding the early history of the Forest, its boundaries, administration, land grants, courts, rights and privileges of its inhabitants. In detailing the industrial activity in the Forest, once again the tension between iron production and preservation of woods as a timber resource is raised:

> Some passages in the course of this narration, may, perhaps excite the reader to lament with me the general neglect of the forest timber which ought to preserved for public use […] And it were to be wished, rather, I fear, than to be expected, in this age of prodigality and extravagance, of venality and corruption, that now before it be too late, proper means may be used to preserve the timber that remains; and that care may be speedily taken to raise a future crop, to be ready for use before the present be intirely exhausted.
> (Rudder, 1779, 37)

Rudder's concern for the forest here is in regard to its role in producing timber. This timber for 'public use' is not suggestive of the local population (be they industrialists, miners, or cottagers seeking common grazing land), rather this is for the state, for naval construction. The forest is a resource of raw materials, his 'lament' being in regard to the well-being of the woods as a potential contributor to the national economy, not the well-being of the natural world or the local population. This is Rudder considering the timber as a resource in the wider improvement of the county or indeed the country, the woods saved from the depredations of the Forest population.

The character of the Forest's inhabitants is indeed brought up in the closing paragraphs on the Forest here, with Rudder making a distinction between the 'gentry' and, 'the poorer sort of people' (37), the former

supposedly having a positive influence in the improvement in behaviour of the latter. Rudder repeats, in close paraphrase but no citation, Camden's now familiar link between the Forester's moral character and the thick wood cover: 'so dark and terrible' that it caused the people to be 'barbarous, and emboldened them to comitt many robberies and outrages, particularly on the banks of the Severn' (Rudder, 1779, 37-38). Rudder does bring a greater nuance to his analysis of the Foresters' character as he goes on to describe them as boasting of their 'independency'. They say that 'their own country is sufficient for them, without being obliged to any other part of the kingdom', and he ends this section with recourse to what he describes as an old proverb: '"Happy is the eye betwixt the Severn and the Wye"' (38). This notion of the Forest as self-contained is one that would appear in various forms in future examples of Forest of Dean literature (discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis). In later sections of the book detailing each parish, further characterisations of the Foresters are made by reference to the local inhabitants at the time when the Romans arrived. Rudder asserts that the local tribe was the Silures and that they were, 'so hardy and active a people,' that they 'gave the Romans more trouble than any of our countrymen' (227). In this there is reflected that earlier Tudor impulse to trace the history of the nation in a direct line back to antiquity, Rudder doing that for his county. Whilst some of England's 'countrymen' capitulated to a foreign invasion, the fiercer elements of Gloucestershire – specifically these proto-Foresters (the Silures) – stood up to defend it. This foreshadows in some respects Victorian fascinations with local dialects as a linguistic line of descent from a pre-Norman, pre-continental Englishness. Rudder is tracing Gloucestershire and the Forest's roots similarly to some mythical point of pre-Roman origin.

As similar as Rudder's descriptions of the Forest are to those earlier accounts, the level of detail in his history as he tackles each parish in the county allows for a much richer picture of the Forest of Dean to appear. What emerges is a Forest with a far greater mix of extractive, heavy and light industry; small-scale farming; fine houses and estates of the local gentry; transport links by road

and river; handsome villages; bequests for the care of the poor; and the establishment of schools. In Rudder's account then the Forest is not simply an area of woodland occupied by wild men, and in this respect his county history represents a significant development of detail and thought since those earliest, largely poetic accounts and earlier travel writing.

Where Rudder's work is extensive it is also well organised, accessible, and a useable reference text still today. Other Gloucestershire county histories resulted in sometimes less coherent collections of records and lists with some remaining as simply research notes that failed to achieve publication. This was the case with Richard Parson's, chancellor of the diocese of Gloucester, work begun in 1690. It was never completed and was described even by himself as 'a rude and undigested heap' (Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society). Margaret Bazeley in her work of 1910 refers to the work of Atkyns and Rudder, and also Bigland (1791), Rudge (1803), and Fasbrooke (1807)[12], but at the same time offers a stinging critique of their value to historians. Bazeley is in sum rather dismissive regarding all of the Gloucestershire county histories of the period in regard to their value in understanding the history of the Forest:

> All the older county histories contain historical sketches of the Forest but they seldom give references, and contain many mistakes. Their value is therefore comparatively light.
> (Bazeley, 1910, 285)

In her list of sources, it is notable (for our purposes here) that she not only lists Nicholls' work of 1858, but also says that it is 'the only work entirely devoted to the subject' (285).

Literary portrayals of the Forest had developed from work that sought to create a poetic part-mythological vision of Britain with the Forest of Dean fulfilling generic ideas about forests in general; to travelogues in which the Forest was simply one brief part of studies seeking to portray the whole of

[12] The latter three adding very little in terms of characterising the people, landscape or economy of the Forest of Dean.

Britain; to increasingly more detailed county histories of Gloucestershire in which the Forest featured. In 1858 the first detailed history of the Forest of Dean, as a place worthy of such attention on its own, was produced by H. G. Nicholls. It drew on many of the earlier accounts above as source material, and it was through Nicholls' work that many of the stories and ideas about the Forest detailed above were perpetuated. Far from fading into obscurity, these earlier depictions and ideas about the Forest persisted. In both its form and aspirations, Nicholls' 1858 work seems to have been inspired by Rudder's county history. Nicholls for the first time, however, applied that same level of detailed inquiry to the Forest alone, and in doing so created a work that would become a source of inspiration, stories and depictions of a distinctive Forest for many years to come.

H. G. Nicholls and the Legacy of Early Depictions of the Forest

Mary Atkins writing in *The New Regard* (2009), the Forest of Dean Local History Society's annual journal, neatly sums up Nicholls' status in the title of her article: *Reverend Henry George Nicholls: The Forest's First Historian.* Cyril Hart, an historian who would himself make a significant contribution in the twentieth century to the understanding of Forest history, explains in his introduction to the 1966 reprint of Nicholls' work that Nicholl's was the first to publish an in-depth and extensive study of the Forest of Dean in its own right. As Hart points out, Nicholls was very much in the mould of the many other members of the clergy around Britain who had pursued their antiquarian interests, fitting their research and writing in between their ecclesiastical work. Nicholls' first work *The Forest of Dean; An Historical and Descriptive Account*, published in 1858, was similar in its aspirations to those earlier county histories, and of course drew on some of them as sources. As well as its antiquarian interests, (one whole chapter is titled 'The original Occupiers of the Forest', including a section with subject heading 'Its Aborigines'), it included details of

the current conditions in the Forest, its geology, industry, and civil life too. Unlike the earlier county histories Nicholls wrote about the Forest of Dean alone rather than as only one part of Gloucestershire. Whilst Nicholls was an inheritor of, and writing partly in the style of, the earlier chorographies and county histories, his eye for a granular level of detail was very much in the spirit of the mid nineteenth century. This was the period of Darwin's and Marx's grand and finely detailed works seeking to describe, understand, and account for the natural or social world around them. Whilst Nicholls' work is not of course on that scale, it can be seen as sharing similar aspirations to undertake detailed inquiry. Yvonne Ffrench writes, if 'The nineteenth century was the age of enthusiasm', mid-century, with its Great Exhibition in 1851, 'was the epitome of its age' (French, 1950, foreword), and Nicholls, writing at this time, shared this enthusiasm, playing his part in detailing this one small part of the kingdom, one small corner of the expanding British empire: it was now recorded, accounted for, available for study.

Cyril Hart remarked in the 1966 reprint that Nicholls' books had been for many years 'eagerly sought after and read' (para 1), providing in the intervening century 'a mine of information to all interested in Dean' (para 4). Hart goes onto explain that he considered Nicholls a friend (though he died long before Hart was born) having himself owned original copies of his books, and having some of Nicholls' correspondence in his possession. The tangibility of Nicholls to Hart is enhanced no doubt by his possession of this ephemera, but also because Nicholls wrote about the same Forest that Hart knew. Nicholl's church, the schools he set up, and the remains of much else that he describes were the very same that Hart knew growing up, much of this still present in 1966 (some of it, though not the church, having since been destroyed). Nicholls' Forest is one that is more easy to relate to in its detail perhaps than that of the earlier writers and historians. With just over a century elapsing between original publication of Nicholls' *The Forest of Dean,* and its reissue, Nicholls' contemporaneous mid-nineteenth-century observations upon the Forest's administration, infrastructure, industry, access to education and religious guidance, and his

assessment of the character of Forest inhabitants, all ensured that his work upon republication in 1966 became an even richer resource on the history of the Forest for the modern reader. As an easily accessible published source on the Forest it is hard to overestimate the impact that his work has had on how the area has been subsequently written about. On its republication in 1966 it would become known about beyond the Forest too, featuring that year on national BBC Radio's Network Three (Genome, *Radio Times* 1923-2009), with a subsequent article in the BBC's *The Listener* magazine (442-3). Titled 'Free miners and foresters', the article is by Forest poet, biographer and memoirist Leonard Clark, and in it he remarks how he himself read Nicholls' books as a teenager. He also acknowledges how much they continue to resonate with him. Though Clark's poetry and other writing would take inspiration from far and wide (including his own extensive travels), he frequently returned to the Forest of Dean's landscape and people as a theme. Though direct specific instances of influence from Nicholls in Clark's work is hard to find it seems that what this rich historical source did do was invest Clark's childhood home with a depth of history beyond merely that of his own personal recollections. Again, this is a history of specific, relatable detail, tangible to the contemporary reader. There are several, more explicit, traces of Nicholls' influence on other authors' work about or set in the Forest of Dean.

Nicholls is explicitly cited in many of the works about the Forest in the years following its original publication. S. M. Crawley-Boevey, in the preface to her *Dene [sic] Forest Sketches, Second Series*, in 1899, acknowledges Nicholls' *Forest of Dean*, and his *The Personalities of the Forest of Dean*, (v) as one of her sources, remarking that the former is, 'a book now out of print' (vi). Her home, the former abbey at Flaxley, and her family, both occur frequently in *The Forest of Dean*, with the family afforded a whole chapter in *The Personalities of the Forest of Dean.* Nicholls' books would have been concise reference sources for her as she delved into the abbey's and her family's own extensive records as she researched for her two collections of stories. An original copy[13] of the 1858

[13] Author's personal collection.

edition of Nicholls' *The Forest of Dean*, book contains a handwritten inscription stating 'Thomas H. Crawley-Boevey – Flaxley Abbey', the name of her brother, so it seems highly likely this was the copy Sibella Mary had access to at the Abbey. Strongly suggestive of her own or her brother's use of the book are hand-written notes in pencil at the back of the book denoting the pages relevant to the family.

Subsequent guidebooks and topographical works on the Forest would also cite Nicholls: Bellows' *A Week's Holiday in the Forest of Dean* published in the 1880's (36), explicitly directs the reader (61) to *Iron Making in the Olden Times*, also by Nicholls; Mabel K. Woods' (1912) work *Newnham-on Severn: A Retrospect*; Arthur O. Cooke in his (1913) *The Forest of Dean* (250); Baty in his *Forest of Dean*, in 1952 (94). Their brief citations of Nicholls are scant acknowledgement for how much his work is likely to have at least provided a starting point for their own researches, if not a more substantial source for much of their history of the Forest.

The founding of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society in 1876 would lead to more scholarly work on the Forest's history, with papers featuring the Forest appearing early in the society's volumes of its transactions, it clearly being a source of some considerable interest. Nicholls' books would have provided a ground work of research and thus would have provided an entry point into new research and writing on Forest history. *Observations on the Iron Cinders found in the Forest of Dean and its Neighbourhood* (Wyrall), in its second volume 1877-78, and on *St. Briavel's Castle* (Allen), in its 3rd 1878-79, both cite Nicholls several times as a source.

For writers of historical fiction too Nicholls would become an invaluable source of historical detail and anecdote. His use of extant sources such as Leland, Camden, Evelyn, Atkyns, Rudder, Bigland, Fosbroke, Rudge, and Parsons – all explicitly cited in his 1858 work – would see some familiar episodes and characterisations of the Forest and its inhabitants that found their way into subsequent Forest fiction. Regardless of their debateable value as reliable source material for the historian, these county histories and their Tudor and

Stuart forbearers have continued, via Nicholls' own work, to influence portrayals of the Forest. The oft repeated story of the hijacking of barges on the River Severn, for example, becomes an essential plot device in Hebe Weenolsen's 1958 novel *To Keep This Oath*, as the young protagonist is captured during one such raid and then forced to work in a Forest coal mine (Ch 11). Before the raid the bargeman explains his fear of these waters:

> "This here be bad country, laddie," he observed by way of rousing the boy from his gloom. "That forest yonder – we bargemen give it wide berth. Why, ye ask. Because 'tis a wild race that lives there, strange devil miners who spend their lives delving deep in the earth for iron and coal"
> (Weenolsen, 1958, 134)

This view from without, from the river looking towards the darkened Forest, is a literary descendant of Camden's viewpoint, and arguably a foreshadowing of that in the radio programme mentioned above.

The supposed orders given to the Spanish Armada that in the event of a failed invasion they should burn down the Forest of Dean to destroy its naval timber that was first mentioned in Camden's *Britannia* (Gibson, 1722, 271), and appears in Evelyn's *Sylva* of 1664 (Evelyn & Nisbet, 1908, 145), becomes the basis for the first part of Tom Bevan's novel *Sea Dogs All! A Tale of Forest and Sea* (1911), as the efforts of a Spanish spy to do just that are thwarted. The Forest would have been familiar to Bevan graduating as a teacher from St Paul's College Cheltenham. The College's library also held copies of Nicholls' *The Forest of Dean,* and *Iron Making in the Olden Times.* The hero of *Sea Dogs All!*, and those of his other Forest novel *The Thane of the Dean* (1899), are Foresters. Bevan appears to be drawing on the reputation of the Forest as described in Nicholls, as well perhaps (directly or via Nicholls) as in earlier work, when two characters in *Sea Dogs All!,* exchange their thoughts on the Forest. Two mariners are on the road between Bristol and Gloucester when one[14] questions, with

[14] Set as it is in the 1580s perhaps Bevan's mariner had just read Camden's *Britannia.*

some concern, if the other intends to visit "that wild region" (156). He admits that:

> "By bad fortune, I am. And from what I hear, 'tis a dangerous place, full of fierce beasts and uncouth people"
> (Bevan, 1911, 156)

To what extent these writers drew specifically on Nicholls, or turned directly to Camden, Cowley, Drayton, or the work of the county historians, is difficult to say at this point. Certainly it seems likely that writers of historical fiction would have consulted either the earlier sources or Nicholls in the course of their research, and, as indicated above, in the case of Bevan and Weenolsen drawing on specific historical anecdotes to inform their storylines. As for the more general descriptions of the Forest and its inhabitants there are some persistent tropes that appear which seem to have been inherited from these earlier accounts. One idea in particular is that of the supposed direct relationship between the Forest's wooded landscape and the character of its inhabitants.

As Camden put it, the dark forest turned them 'barbarous, and emboldened them to comitt many robberies and outrages' (Gibson, 1722, 269), and over three hundred years later, in James Playsted Wood's *The Golden Swan* (1965), an historical novel set in the Forest of 1639 'The oaks grew so thick and tall that the Forest was dark' (5). His young protagonist, Jem, was afraid of meeting some of the Forest inhabitants 'who hid deep in the woods in rude sod cabins from which they made forays on the Forest enclosures or on shipping in the Severn', and he was 'glad when the woods opened as he neared the lake' (57). Once again the woods here are symbolic of a dark and frightening natural world, the home of wild people – starved of light, starved of the values of civilisation. John Moore writing in 1933 recalled that year being at an inn at Dursley Cross, about to set off for the Forest on route to the Welsh Marches. Two men warn him:

> '"A bad place, sir, with bad people. They're rough

> and wild and uncivilised. I wouldn't recommend the gentleman to go walking in the Forest"'
> (Moore, 1933a, 5)

In the hands of other, seemingly more sympathetic writers of Forest of Dean literature this stigmatisation could re-appropriated (Galinsky *et al*, 2003), leading to a reformulation of these same traits as a strong sense of independence, self-sufficiency and robustness sourced from the landscape or nature itself. In Thomas Mayne Reid's historical novel set during the English Civil War, again the link between the Forest landscape and its inhabitants appears, though this time more sympathetically. Reid's native-Forester, Rob *Wilde* (my emphasis) was 'majestic in his mein', possessing a 'savage grandeur' as he was a '"true free-born Forester"' (Reid, c1880, 82-83). We first meet Rob as he, appropriately enough, emerges from the edge of the woods onto the road having already signalled his presence with a wild bird call. Wilde becomes a crucial character in the plot, helping to defeat Sir John Wintour whose destructive exploits in the Forest during the period are covered in some depth by Nicholls, both in his *The Forest of Dean,* and in *The Personalities of the Forest of Dean (1863)*. 'We Foresters 'll deal wi' him' (85), says Wilde before going on to do just that. For Reid, Wilde represents the best of English native steadfastness rooted in the landscape, a product of nature undiluted by effete urbanity, an echo of the Green Man and Robin Hood. In Harry Beddington's work, if writing in a much lighter tone in 1961, the same echo of Camden can be seen reverberating, but again, celebrated as a positive characteristic (see Chapter Three of this thesis).

Whilst Nicholls' work played its part in perpetuating some of the ideas about the Forest found in the earliest accounts, his own work, though drawing on and frequently quoting at length many of them, is more than simply a collation of previous historical writing on the Forest. As the full title of his 1858 work makes clear it was also [...] *Derived From Personal Observation,* and other sources including *Legendary,* and *Local.* Unlike so many of the previous historians, topographers and travel writers, Nicholls – as local resident and

curate - had an intimate knowledge of the Forest and its community. Atkins' (2009) writes that Nicholls was born in Southwell, Nottinghamshire, attended Rugby School, and was awarded a scholarship to study theology at Cambridge before securing the perpetual curacy of Holy Trinity Church in Drybrook (near the then expanding industrial and commercial town of Cinderford) in 1847. As well as his duties as curate at Drybrook, Nicholls was very active in the community, for example setting up several schools (Jurica, 1996a, 408). He was president of the Forest of Dean Association for Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses, and seems to have taken the opportunity to engage its members in their local history. An account of one of their meetings details a trip led by Nicholl's to the nearby Goodrich Castle at which he explained its history (*Gloucester Journal*, 1858). He is also recorded as giving a local lecture on Forest history in 1863 at Blakeney School (*Gloucester Journal*, 1863). Nicholls, as an active figure in local education, as curate, and as an expert on local history, appears to have been appreciated by his local community. After retiring due to ill health he was presented with a silver plate by his former parishioners 'in testimony of the respect and affection they bear towards him' (*Gloucester Journal*, 1866), and following his death a memorial tablet to him, paid for by his parishioners, was erected in the church, his various good works having, as the tablet records 'endeared him to the memory of the Foresters' (*Gloucester Journal*, 1868). Living in the Forest, and being involved actively in its community afforded Nicholls opportunities to gain a deeper and wider understanding of the area and its people. It is perhaps no surprise then that when Nicholls wrote *The Personalities of the Forest of Dean* (1863), whilst the book primarily deals with local Forest worthies both past and present, he reserved his final chapter for 'Foresters in general' (172). Though a great deal of it deals with historical background, much of the latter part appears informed by Nicholls' own experience of living amongst the Foresters, detailing customs and superstitions, and an anecdote that he translates into Forest dialect. Living in the Forest, getting to know its places and people, gives Nicholls' work a depth of appreciation and understanding of the Forest of Dean that earlier topographical

or travel writers, often passing briefly through the area, or drawing on historical records alone, struggled to achieve.

If Nicholls' work as a whole, informed by his work and life in the Forest, as well as his detailed archival and antiquarian research, offers a more detailed and rounded picture of the Forest and its residents, the earlier portrayals of the Forest, relatively few in number as they are, continued to act as source material in terms of ideas and historical anecdote for Forest of Dean literature. The Forest of Dean that these literary works depicted is one formed from a combination of scant historical source material and anecdote, observation, and generic ideas about forests. Combined, these become some of the founding tropes of later Forest of Dean literature: here is the literary genetic material from which so much of Forest of Dean literature is made. As has been shown, Nicholls' work played an important part in transmitting these ideas in the latter half of the nineteenth century (and again in the latter half of the twentieth century) as both inspiration and direct source. In this respect his work is vitally important in the development of Forest of Dean literature. His is not, however, the first work that might be considered as such, the first Forest of Dean literature, work that began to describe a distinctive Forest being published some decades before, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In beginning to explore some of those early Forest authors some of the persistent tropes of the Forest of Dean can be seen perpetuated, their lineage traceable back to the early-modern accounts, poetic or otherwise, of the Forest of Dean explored at the beginning of this chapter.

Chapter 2.

The Birth of Forest of Dean Literature

"I zoy," said Bill Proctor, "it only wants one quarter to
ten, and that ere beard of the vorest not come, by gor,
he'll be too late after all."
(Wickenden, 1850, 177)

Rail-roads you see, and tunnel through Hay hill;
From Bilson coal works, down to Bullo Pill.
(Drew, 1841, 25)

Recent research, including for this thesis, has begun to rediscover some of the Forest's earliest literary output. This chapter establishes a chronology of these early-nineteenth century (and later century) works, and explores to what extent they form the beginnings of a distinctive Forest of Dean literature, describing a specific and distinctive Forest.

This is writing that sometimes reflected some of the same ideas about the Forest, some of which were generic characteristics of forests and forest-dwelling people in general, as described in the previous chapter. Some of the nineteenth-century Forest authors' work also simply replicated the conventions of the pastoral. As will be revealed, these early and mid-nineteenth-century writers nonetheless began to portray an ever-more specific and distinctive Forest of Dean. They would begin to establish many of what would become familiar tropes of the Forester, (independence and robust self-sufficiency, humour, truculence), and of the Forest itself as a place (industry, and ancient rights) that would persist to the present day. Whilst the poet Catherine Drew was republished in the intervening years and has persisted to some extent in local popular memory, three of her contemporaries, one of whom would attain some wide literary success, have been largely forgotten.

The work of Catherine Drew, born 1784, has been reasonably well known amongst Forest of Dean historians for some time. Her 1841 collection of poems was republished in 1904, and again in 2002, and in 2012 a cast-iron memorial plaque was erected near her burial place at St John the Evangelist Church in Cinderford. One of Drew's poems in the 1841 collection *The Days of My Childhood, or the Contrast,* is such a succinct and direct source of contemporaneous detail and summary of Forest history that it has been regularly quoted by subsequent writers on the Forest: first by Nicholls in 1858, and later by, for example, W. H. Potts in his 1949 book *Roaming Down The Wye*, F. W. Baty in *Forest of Dean* (1952), Chris Fisher in *Custom, Work and Market Capitalism* (1981), Ralph Anstis in *Warren James and The Dean Forest Riots* (1986). Drew's straightforward language and simple rhyming couplets, and avoidance of complex metaphor or literary devices, presents a highly accessible and quotable source for anyone wishing to encapsulate the history of the Forest. Just as Nicholls would a decade or so later, Drew's published poems also focus very much on the Forest of Dean itself in contrast to her immediate Forest contemporaries who often worked upon a broader geographical canvas. In David Adams' recent work on her contemporary, Forest poet Richard Morse, it is Catherine Drew that Adams turned to for a sense of local events shaping the Forest at the time, as it is Catherine who has, 'left us a plain-speaking record of the times' (Adams, Nancollas, 2012, 4).

Drew's *relative* familiarity is in stark contrast to three, until recently largely forgotten Forest authors, William Wickenden who during his lifetime was referred to, and refered to himself, as 'Bard of the Forest' (Adams and Nancollas, 2012, 6), Richard Morse, and Phillip John Ducarel with his epic poem of 1836 *De Wyrhale: A Tale of Dean Forest In five Cantos*. All four of these writers together represent a body of work that is only now beginning to be considered with any scholarly interest, in the case of Wickenden and Morse largely down the research and publications of David Adams. His 2012 work with Chris Noncollas on Richard Morse, and his 2016 work on Wickenden, have provided important biographical and bibliographical information about these two fascinating early

Forest of Dean writers, as well as giving some useful historical context and initial analysis of their work. Whilst some fascinating biographical information has been brought together regarding Phillip Ducarel for the Reading the Forest project, a 2013 paper by Christie Arno in *The Times Literary Supplement*, on an unpublished Wordsworth poem connects Ducarel to no less than Samuel Taylor Coleridge's circle. These links notwithstanding, Ducarel is marked locally (at All Saints Church, Newland) in connection to his good works as a local benefactor rather than for his literary output, indicative perhaps of the less popular nature of his writing.

What is beginning to emerge is that although the Forest of Dean may not have been at the centre it was certainly not excluded from wider national cultural and literary currents. Some of its authors would develop connections, of a sort, with some of the towering literary figures of the age. Ducarel, as noted with Coleridge's circle, Wickenden with Dickens[15]. And whilst significant literary figures of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Defoe, Gilpin, Wordsworth) would pass through the region, often only encountering its fringes from the banks of the River Wye, it was left to these four Forest authors examined here to begin to describe more fully a distinctive and more nuanced Forest of Dean. The first of these to do so was William Wickenden.

William Wickenden

(1796 - 1864)

David Adams' 2016 work on the Rev. William S. Wickenden *Severnside to Circassia: Being the Life & Works of the remarkable Rev. William Wickenden of Etloe Bard of the Forest,* has revealed a prodigious author of both poetry and prose. He was born and grew up in Etloe, today a small-farming area sandwiched between Severn-side and the wooded slopes of the Forest. Adams suggests

[15] 'Dickens subscribed to two copies of Wickenden's *Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Wickenden*, 1847 (list of subscribers in *Passages*). Wickenden dedicated to Dickens *Adventures in Circassia*' (Lohrli, 1971)

Wickenden was taught to read and write by his father, and that his writing talents would have been encouraged by the schoolmaster at the near-by Lydney Academy. William Gardiner, who Wickenden himself mentions in his *Poems and Tales: With An Autobiographical Sketch of His Early Life* (1851a, xl), was himself a published poet and author[16]. Gardiner's work offered flights of fanciful adventure across the globe in his children's stories, a fact that, as Adam's points out (11), may have had a significant influence on Wickenden's choice of subject matter for his own novels. Wickenden's first novel *Count Glarus of Switzerland* (1819), set a pattern for what would become 'Flashman-like adventures' (Cross, 2014, 205), for much of his output, with such entertaining tall-tales as *Adventures in Circassia* (1847), *A Sequel to the Adventures in Circassia* (1848), and *Adventures Before Sebastapol* (1855). As Adams argues, these tales of travel and daring-do were responses to the literary tastes of the time that favoured travel and adventure in its subject matter, and in a form that presented it as autobiography. In short Wickenden's accounts of overseas adventure are fictional rather than actual journeys he had taken.

In contrast to his fanciful adventure tales, Wickenden's very first publication was a collection of poetry *The Rustic's Lay, and other poems*, published in 1817. Its publication was made possible by the fact that he had established correspondence with Dr Edward Jenner (the pioneer of vaccination) who lived at Berkley on the other side of the Severn which was, as Adams reminds us, then only a short ferry ride or, depending on the tides a short walk from Wickenden's side of the river. As a piece on the history of literary endeavour in Gloucestershire in the *Gloucester Journal* (1865) pointed out, Jenner would himself take relief from his professional work 'by occasional indulgence in poetical composition'. As well as encouragement, Adams suggests that Jenner would have played a part in generating subscribers from his own circle of acquaintances, making publication possible through guaranteed sales to cover the costs of printing. The list of nearly two hundred subscribers

[16] As none of Gardiner's work concerned the Forest of Dean in any way it will not be considered as part of this thesis

(Wickenden, 1817, 11-16), the majority of them local to either Wickenden or Jenner, provides evidence of a developed readership in the area. As well as local gentry such as Lord Bathhurst of Lydney Park the list includes several members of the clergy as well as two captains, a lieutenant, and several surgeons. There are many women in the list, both married and single, and very many seemingly non-professional people too. Without further research it is not possible to gauge the social class of this wider group, however it is clear that the towns and villages of the Forest of Dean included many people willing to support a new local writer. Similarly, there were over two hundred subscribers to Catherine Drew's 1841 collection of poems, nearly all of them local Forest of Dean residents. Though good education for all would only be established later in the nineteenth century there were already six charity schools listed in the Newland area alone as early as 1712 with the village's grammar school able to trace its origins back to at least the fifteenth century (Herbert, 1996a, 228). There was then a sufficient number of educated people in the Forest to provide a market for new books including those by local authors. Also apparent from Wickenden's subscriber list is the number of subscribers from beyond the Forest (London, Bristol, Bath) most probably personal connections of Jenner's, evidence of the Forest's connections beyond the region.

Adams suggests that it may have been Jenner who funded William's successful entry into St John's College Cambridge from where he graduated in 1825, followed by his taking on a curacy near Yeovil (24). The exact details of his life after this are confused by Wickenden's own differing versions in his numerous supposedly-autobiographical works. Adams believes that Wickenden did in reality suffer some sort of emotional distress around this time, as well as serious ill health that would lead to him losing his voice and thus his livelihood as a preacher, as Wickenden himself outlines in *Poems and Tales: With an Autobiographical Sketch of His Early Life* (1851a). The loss of this line of work necessitated reliance on his alternative literary career, a fact confirmed in his obituary in the *Gloucester Journal* (1864). This economic necessity would inevitably influence his choice of genre and subject matter, his writing shaped

by popular literary tastes to ensure commercial success. As the same obituary noted his work 'secured the favourable notice of reviewers', and in the latter period of his life he was 'in comfortable and independent circumstances', testament to his level of literary success.

Despite Wickenden's early efforts as a poet, it would be his novels in the form of pseudo-memoirs that would bring him wider literary success between 1850 and 1860. Although these novels themselves were set far away from the Forest of Dean they do contain occasional references to the Forest. In *Adventures in Circassia* (1847), for example, he likens his character to that of a holly bush, and as he points out, 'You well know our Dean Forest produces holly-bushes, and that those holly-bushes are both tough and prickly' (Wickenden, n.d., iii). Despite expressing his desperation to escape the Forest as a youth, Wickenden's work includes several such fond references to his childhood home patch. Although on the whole not writing in great depth about the Forest of Dean as a distinctive place (as opposed to a rather generic rural backdrop to his early life) the Forest does make more significant appearances in some of his other books. Even in his tales of international travel and adventure presented in the autobiographical form, Wickenden always refers to himself as 'Bard of the Forest', the title possibly first given to him by the *Gentleman's Magazine* (*Gloucester Journal*, 1864). This is a description of his origin, he being *of* the Forest rather than a description of what he does: he is not (on the whole) a teller of tales of the Forest of Dean. When he does occasionally describe it, he most often describes a Forest that is a place of generic natural landscape and beauty. In *A Queer Book* (1850), for example, he describes where he grew up as 'on the banks of the Severn, where that beautiful stream washes the romantic glades of the Forest of Dean' (Wickenden, 1850, 1). Later in the same book he describes his seven year old self getting lost with his sheepdog and having 'strayed into the Forest of Dean', and he gets lost being 'not much accustomed to the intricacies of the wood' (126). The young Wickenden temporarily loses his dog who later, rather heroically, returns with his flock of sheep all the way from South Wales 'through all the labyrinthine windings of the Forest of Dean'(129).

The wooded Forest is then for Wickenden another place, quite separate from his home on the banks of the Severn, and his description of the Forest here is an inheritor of those Tudor descriptions of the Forest (that themselves drew on ideas about forests in general), such as Camden's Forest of Dean of 'shades and cross-ways' (Gibson, 1722, 269). Wickenden's description of the forest-proper in *A Queer Book*, may be a true reflection of his view of the inner more thickly wooded central Forest of Dean seen from his perspective as someone who had grown up in the more open, agricultural lands of the Severn-side. The woods for Wickenden were a strange and confusing place compared to the open farmlands around his home where he grew up. For the most part his descriptions of the Forest of Dean display little specificity and tend instead toward generic nature writing such as in these two examples. In *A Queer Book*, he describes leaving home:

> There is a small beautiful green hill that overlooks my native village, and on this hill I stood and took a long, lingering look of my natal scenes ere quitted them for ever. The old oak, amid whose umbrageous branches I was accustomed to clamber, the sweet nook where I was accustomed to gather the earliest violets, the pellucid streamlet winding through the valley, the daffodils dancing on the green margin of the mossy fountain, the tuft of black thorns where the linnet used to construct her airy build—all passed in review before me as in a panorama.
> (Wickenden, 1850, 146)

In *Poems and Tales: With an Autobiographical Sketch of His Early Life*, he similarly describes Etloe:

> Oh, loved village of my soul! thy beauties raise as plainly before me as they did long years ago, when I thought nothing on earth so delightful as to bury myself in thy solitary, thy sylvan recesses. The flowers around thee were more transcendently beautiful, thy birds sang with a sweeter melody than elsewhere.
> (Wickenden, 1851a, xvi)

These descriptions focussing on idyllic nature are of course highly selective in the scene they portray, the better perhaps to contrast the innocence of his early life amongst nature with his later adventures. There is little here that distinguish the places he describes from any other rural scene. As David Adams points out, Wickenden's descriptions of his childhood home leave much of the local scenery out that does not fit his pastoral reverie. The village green of near-by Gatcombe, very close to Etloe where Wickenden grew up and would frequently return, would in those days have more likely been a 'pool of mud' (Adams, 2016, 2), due to it being part of not only a busy port (one of several shipping out the industrial goods of the Forest via the Severn) but also a place of industrial manufacture in its own right. These dreamy, highly idealised pastoral scenes set in the Forest of Dean, prevalent in Wickenden's writing from his first published work onwards, also drew criticism at the time. In a review of *The Rustic's Lay, and other poems* in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, of September 1819, the reviewer clearly has a different understanding of the Forest of Dean to that depicted by Wickenden. The reviewer describes the Forest as 'that blacksmithing and colliering part of the kingdom' (Urban, 1819, 244). He / she continues that there may indeed be some 'spots in it of exquisite picturesque beauty', but that these have been rendered by Wickenden with 'insipid affectation.' The complaint is that Wickenden is failing to reflect what the reviewer considers to be the full picture of the Forest of Dean, one in which industrial production and extraction is a prominent part. The reviewer also though takes issue with Wickenden's portrayal of the natural world itself, perhaps quite fairly judging Wickenden's nature poetry against his more critically acclaimed contemporaries. The reviewer concludes with a recommendation that Wickenden should cease writing poems for 'the Foresters of Dean', for 'that is only introducing nightingales into a Deaf and Dumb asylum' (245). Instead the reviewer recommends that Wickenden, once through his period of literary apprenticeship, takes up the writing of novels descriptive of character both 'individual and national' (245). The reviewer also helpfully suggests that a novel drawing on '*Welsh* peculiarities, is a desideratum.' With

Wickenden living so near to it he could, says the reviewer, easily make some observations and if he were to 'aid it by his descriptive powers, as well as good concatenated story, it might better answer his purpose' (Urbanus, 1819, 245). Wickenden seems to have taken note, ever perhaps in pursuit of popular and commercially lucrative literary taste, as in 1821 he published *Bleddyn, a Welsh National Tale.* In effect the young Wickenden as poet is seen by this one reviewer as wasting his time as Bard of [for] the Forest, and should more productively, in line with contemporary tastes turn his hand to being Bard [describer] of the Forest for an *external* readership.

Wickenden's poetry continued however in much the same vein; his collection of 1827 'Poems', for example included 'Sketches From Nature', 'Ode to Fancy', and 'Fancy Sketches', the latter with verses such as 'The Mermaid', 'The Fairies' Hall', and 'The Happy Valley'. They are all poems that very much continue in the mode of fanciful nature writing and pastoral, and continue to ignore the industrial development and social changes that were happening in the Forest of Dean at the time. Before, however, wholly disregarding Wickenden as an author who showed any interest in writing about the specifics of the Forest as a place (as opposed to a generic countryside), two examples of his writing stand out as giving a richer and more distinctive picture of the Forest. The first of these is in his work of 1850.

A Queer Book (1850), is a fascinating miscellany that includes a story set in the Peninsula War, a polemic in support of vegetarianism, and an account of a ghost story prank perpetrated supposedly by Wickenden using a pumpkin lantern set in his local Awre churchyard. It is his final tale in the book that is of interest here. 'My First Steeple Chase' (176-185), is not only set in the Forest of Dean but it also features what may be the first appearance in a literary work of

Forest dialect[17] (examined in more detail below). It's a highly entertaining tale that begins:

> Thousands of hardy foresters were congregated on Little Dean's Baily, Forest of Dean, on the 22nd day of June, 1815 […] It was the morning of a steeple chase from the Baily to Putnage, a wild tract of country, broken into deep ravines, and intersected with uncouth gullies, steep embankments and ragged stone walls.
> (Wickenden, 1850, 176)

Wickenden is taking part in the race on his faithful mount 'Blucher', racing against fellow Foresters. Bill Proctor 'a kind of unowned rascal' (177), at the starting line is wondering where William has got to:

> "I zoy," said Bill Proctor, "it only wants one quarter to ten, and that ere beard of the vorest not come, by gor, he'll be too late after all."[18]
> (Wickenden, 1850, 177)

Wickenden, as he features in the story, does not speak in dialect until, at the feast to celebrate the end of the wild and rambunctious race (he of course being the winner, through guile and intelligence rather than horsemanship), he concludes his address to the gathered company:

[17] Dialect is used permissively here and in the thesis as a whole to denote deviation from standard English. Though more properly a dialect might be defined as displaying 'differences of grammar and vocabulary', whilst mere 'variations in pronunciation', would be classed as distinction of accent, 'Many people, including linguists, do not draw a sharp distinction between the meanings of the two terms' (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt, 2012, 3). In the interests of accuracy in regard to the citation, Hughes et al do themselves draw such a distinction.

[18] Here the rendering of dialect replaces 'say' with 'zoy', 'beard' for 'Bard,' and 'vorest' for 'Forest.' Distinctive as Wickenden's deviation from standard English is in this chapter, it is largely in regard to spelling as suggestive of distinctive local pronunciation. There is no inclusion of the specific vocabulary associated with the Forest such as 'butty' and other terms emanating from mining and other local custom. Wickenden's writing is aimed at a contemporary national readership and as such he wishes to remain readable and understandable to such an audience.

> So saying I sat down and gave with a thundering voice.
> [sic] and the true forest brogue, "I be a jovial vorister,"
> &c., &c.
> (Wickenden, 1850,184)

Wickenden both as character in the tale and as author demonstrates here that despite his education, social standing and time spent away from the area, he can still switch back to his native dialect and a traditional local song of his boyhood days, thus demonstrating his camaraderie with his fellow Foresters. Soon after fellow rider Jack Prosser sings another song and again Wickenden the author demonstrates his skill in capturing the dialect:

> "Come all you voir moidens wherever e be
> Never vix your avections on a green willy tree,
> Vor the leaves thoy will wither and the roots will decoy,
> And the beawty of a voir moid will zoon vade awoy"[19]
> (Wickenden, 1850, 184)

Wickenden's use of dialect in this story, the inclusion of specific places and the absence of generic pastoral features, all give it a specificity of place that most of Wickenden's other supposedly locally-set scenes lack. It is notable that this more specific focus on characteristics of a distinctive Forest of Dean came after the publication of Richard Morse's short story set in the Forest in 1836, and his collection of poems (some, as will be shown below, mentioning specific Forest locations) of 1840; Ducarel's Forest-set epic poem of 1836; and Catherine Drew's collection of poems almost exclusively focusing on the Forest published in 1841. To what extent Wickenden may have been directly influenced by these is not yet known, however it seems likely that these writers' work may have suggested to him that there was some appetite and interest in reading work inclusive of authentic local description.

[19] Here again 'f' is replaced with 'v', and 'oy' replaces 'ay'. The 'willy tree' is a willow, and 'moid' is a maid.

Wickenden's use of dialect in particular, deployed here in part for comic effect, a seemingly suitable form of speaking for his robust fellow Foresters, also adds to the specificity of place for his readership. His use of dialect, brief as it is, portrays him (in the story) as well-educated and middle-class and sets him apart from the other Foresters, working men he describes as 'thick-set bronzed personages' (177). However comic their role in the tale, there is in Wickenden's presentation of his 'brother foresters' (178), a level of fondness and respect. His class, education and time living away from the Forest sets up a degree of separation between him and them; his momentary re-adoption of dialect, his participation in this robust local contest, his knowledge of the local landscape and his general sense of camaraderie he displays with his fellow Foresters, all create a story in which his character is as much the subject of our amusement as the dialect-speaking locals. This is an inclusive[20] humour in which the semi-fictionalised Wickenden is as much as any of the other characters the subject of the humour.

A second example of Wickenden portraying the Forest of Dean in some specific detail was his story in Dickens' *Household Words*, magazine (1851b), and features once again the same location and again the character of Jack Prosser. In this piece Wickenden details the local historical and geographical context as a set up for the story, also describing the mix of landscape, and the mix of extractive industries all set amongst the Forest's 'majestic oaks' (461). His tale is set at a time when the Forest's timber reserves were considered to be much denuded resulting in the crown building more enclosures. This took large areas of land out of common pasture to protect it from the depredations of grazing sheep and cattle. As was historical fact, with riots in the Forest in 1831 (Anstis, 1986; Nicholls, 1858, 110-114), in Wickenden's story there was much disgruntlement amongst the Forest community at what was seen as a restriction on long established common practice and an essential element of the Forest's mixed economy. Leading an uprising of locals to destroy the enclosures in Wickenden's story is none other than Jack Prosser, here described as 'a wild

[20] See Chapter Five of this thesis for the concept of a Forest gaze.

Orson of a fellow' (462). Again Wickenden appears in the story with this time the competition between him and Jack being a romantic one as they vie for the affections of local young woman Mary Llewellyn. The story is full of specific detail in regard to places, landscape, history and life for people in the Forest at the time. Mary's grandmother for example, Winifred Kear, is a squatter having illegally built her cottage on crown land, a long-standing practice in the Forest that was periodically tackled by the authorities (Jurica, 1996b, 300-324). Winifred makes her living as an ash burner, burning ferns to create alkali (used is washing clothes) and keeps sheep that according to Wickenden was 'a breed I believe, peculiar to our forest' (462). When Jack and his fellow Foresters desert their protest in the face of advancing troops it is the young Wickenden who attempts to rally them, whereupon they accuse him of being a spy and lower him into a coal mine as punishment, later to be rescued by Mary. These elements all contribute to a strong sense of specificity of place: A specific breed of sheep, a particular form of settlement, woods occupied by coal mines, description of a protest inspired by real events (the riots of 1831), all go towards creating a picture of a specific and distinctive Forest of Dean.

Dickens' *Household Words* magazine had a weekly circulation of approximately 35,000, a figure comparable to that of *The Times* (Drew, Mackenzie, Winyard, 2011), meaning that Wickenden's short story in it presented his depiction of the Forest of Dean to a wide national reading public. Of these four early Forest authors it is Wickenden who arguably reached the largest and most widespread readership with his work. Though the Forest rarely appeared in such a central starring role in Wickenden's writing he regularly used his growing up here, along with his identification as Bard of the Forest, to introduce his character as narrator and hero of his pseudo-biographical, semi-satirical tales. His anecdotal form, and his few uses of Forest dialect, in particular in the closing section of *A Queer Book,* marks him out as perhaps the first writer of a specific sort of Forest of Dean tale. These tales, presented as the truth though with a metaphorical knowing wink to the reader that they might not

need to be taken as literal fact, featured the author as part-hero, part-fool in various scrapes.

As a once popular and prolific author it is Wickenden though who arguably brought the idea of the Forest of Dean as a place to the widest readership. Much like his near contemporary Richard Morse, Wickenden's place amongst Forest authors seems to have fallen into obscurity until his recent rediscovery.

Richard Morse

(1811 - 1875)

A contemporary of Wickenden's was Richard Morse. Once again it is David Adams, this time with Yorkley A&E (Arts & Entertainment) colleague Dr Chris Nancollas, who has recently published research on this largely forgotten Forest poet and author. In *A Native Forester: the life and poems of Richard Morse of Yorkley* (2012), Adams makes a strong case for the importance of Morse as a Forest author alongside Wickenden and Catherine Drew. He explains that Morse grew up in Yorkley, a small settlement that at the time was growing as industry in the Forest was undergoing a period of expansion. Richard's father was a shoemaker and a mine owner, and the family may have owned several pits. Adams says that both parents were literate and are likely to have taught their son to read and write. Richard may also have been taught by William Gardiner (under whom Wickenden studied as a youngster). In his twenties Morse moved to Gloucester to work as a clerk and later played a role in setting up the town's Mechanics Institute. Adams points out that unfortunately only two extant works of Morse's are known, (both held by Gloucestershire Archives). The first is a very short booklet-sized novel *The Forest Marauders: A Tale* (1836).

Although Adams' pays the first of Morse's publications little detailed attention (preferring reasonably enough to concentrate on Morse's more extensive poetry), he does make a brief but seductive case that *The Forest Marauders*, is an allegorical response to the financial speculators who at that

time were beginning to turn their attention to the Forest of Dean's under-capitalised coal mining industry, they being the 'marauders' of the title. Adams argues that Morse's preface claiming his story has 'not the least foundation in facts' (Morse, 1836, 3), was intended to be 'tongue in cheek' (Adams & Nancollas, 2012, 8), with the whole story in reality a commentary on contemporary events. This is an intriguing idea, and reading in Morse's preface his suggestion that, despite being 'a native and an inhabitant of the Forest', he knows nothing of its history 'farther than a few years back' (Morse, 1836, 3), seems to back up Adams' assertion. Morse does seem to be heavily hinting that, as he knows nothing about the period he's writing, it must relate to what he does know: recent history. That said there is little else in the story that paints a picture of a distinctive Forest of Dean rather than a more generic woodland setting. The story itself appears to be set at some unspecified point in the mediaeval period, and features a band of disaffected soldiers who withdraw to the woods to escape 'the wars which desolated the country for many years' (Morse, 1836, 6). In a description of woodlands familiar to those described in Chapter One of this thesis, a literary inheritance of much earlier times, the band's hideout is protected by being amongst the forest, 'as the paths which led to it were so intricate and obscure, that none, except those who were well acquainted with them, could find it' (6). These outlaws survive off the land, escaping for the time being the laws and norms of mainstream society, hidden in effect by the 'shades and cross-ways' (Gibson, 1722, 269), that had been described by Camden. In the sometimes intricate, confusing, plot-heavy narrative that follows there are occasional references to the River Severn but little else that roots the story in the Forest of Dean as a real and particular place. In the final lines of the story Morse does end with a very particular description of the local inhabitants:

> and many privileges were granted to them and their descendants in the forest, who, ever since that period, have been a remarkably liberal and loyal, though a rude and uncouth, people.
> (Morse, 1836, 22)

With his family's interests in mining, this is most likely a reference to the privileges of the Freeminers in the Forest that date back to at least 1244 (Hart, 2002, 6), so that the 'loyalty' expressed here is of a very particular kind: that of a direct loyalty to the crown specifically, to whom the Freeminers of the Forest owed their rights to mine. It was the crown the Freeminers entered into partnership with in each mine, 'the right of the Crown to put in without payment a fifth man for every four employed' (Wood, 1878, 7). This fifth man would in reality be replaced by a royalty paid by the mine according to the weight of coal extracted. The Forest's Freeminers were effectively in business with the crown, perceived as a direct partnership with the monarch rather than with the government of the day. Unlike other rural communities often reliant on the largess of local landowners, or the urban working classes dependent on work provided by capitalist masters, the Foresters felt a level of independence, their economic rights as miners having been granted by the monarch. As Adams explains, Morse's family were Freeminers, (and owning several mines they were *relatively* comfortably off), so they had a vested interest in loyalty to the crown – the Queen – for whom they in-effect owed their livelihoods with their rights to exploit the mineral resources of the Forest. This specific loyalty to the crown did not entail a more general deference. A sense of this direct relationship with the crown is also reflected in Morse's poem 'The Forester's Song', from his only collection of poetry, *Lays of the Forest and Other Poems* (1840):

> And with hearts as our dear native woods staunch and free,
> Ever loyal and ready will foresters be,
> To contend for their Queen, and their country, and laws,
> And to punish the wretch that deserts freedom's cause.
> (Morse, 1840, cited in Adams & Nancollas, 2012, 30)

As Adams is at pains to point out (14), Morse's concept of freedom and loyalty to the Queen was a very specific matrix of beliefs born of the legal, economic, and cultural context of the Forest of Dean, and not a more general jingoistic celebration of Britain's democracy. This might be contrasted with

Catherine Drew's more straightforward celebration of royal rule as expressed in her poem 'The Queen's Wedding Day; Or The Rose of Old England' (Drew,1841, 34), with such phrases as 'the banners of Britain be waved on high', 'May no heart of a traitor, e'er break their repose', and a warning that she will 'make Jacobins rue'. Morse's more circumspect loyalty contains a warning too but his, by contrast is against any 'wretch that deserts freedom's cause'.

Returning to Morse's description of the Foresters, in *The Forest Marauders*, his description of them as 'rude', can be more sympathetically read as meaning 'roughly made' (Hawkins & Allen, 1991, 1,264), whilst 'uncouth', as simply 'lacking in ease and polish' (1,569). This characterisation of Forest of Dean people is one that we see repeated in various forms throughout Forest of Dean literature. The Forester as rough-hewn, lacking sophistication and the manners/affectations of mainstream civilized society. 'A sort of robustic wild people, that must be civilised by good discipline and government' (Parsons, n.d., cited in Nicholls, 1858, 56), wrote Dr Parsons at the end of the seventeenth century describing the people of the Forest of Dean. '[A]bout as little changed since Adam first set them going as any people I've ever seen or heard of', wrote Charles Grindrod in 1886 (305), and according to John Moore's reporting of what a pub landlady on the edge of the Forest said '"They're rough and wild and uncivilized"' (Moore, 1933a, 5). Regardless of any actual historical sources for these conceptions of a Forest identity (raids on Severn barges, civil disobedience in the face of enclosures or the erosion of traditional rights, the dominance of working and artisanal classes amongst the population), and any extent to which these are unique to this region, it is a mythology that has become much repeated throughout Forest of Dean literature, and one that has, as will be seen in work of the following century, a mark of Forest identity. It can also be seen in work of the latter nineteenth century too. In Thomas Mayne Reid's *No Quarter!*, these qualities manifest themselves in the character of Rob Wilde (also mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis) who was 'In size a Colossus; dark-complexioned' (Reid, circa 1880, 82), remarkably similar to Wickenden's Foresters as 'thick-set bronzed personages' (1850, 177). As with the Foresters

described in Morse's 'The Forester's Song', freedom is a defining element in Rob and his fellow Foresters' identity. When Rob meets a friend who is a fellow-Forester he describes him as 'A true free-born Forester, as myself' (83). This sense of freedom, independence and physical robustness, becomes a theme found throughout Forest of Dean literature in the descriptions of Forest people, and Morse's brief allusion to it is one of his few direct expressions of the Forest as a distinctive place with a specific sense of identity. As Chris Nancollas points out, only three of Morse's poems are directly connected with the Forest of Dean, 'frustratingly few in number' (Adams, Nancollas, 2012, 48). Despite this, Morse's identification like Wickenden as Bard of the Forest, and the inclusion of an excerpt of his poetry by Nicholls in his detailed 1858 account of *The Forest of Dean*, places him securely amongst the first authors of Forest of Dean literature. Sadly, Morse appears to have forgone further literary work, though as Adams' research indicates he may have been working towards a revised edition of his one collection of poetry at the time of his death (Adams, Nancollas, 2012, 21). Like Wickenden, Morse become largely forgotten, both of their names preserved as entries in the *Catalogue of the Gloucestershire Collection* (Austin, 1928), and in Morse's case, a single poem as a footnote in Nicholls' work on the Forest (1858, 150-151). The third Forest author of this period, Phillip Ducarel, though remembered with a local church memorial for other reasons, would similarly be largely forgotten in regard to his literary output.

Philip Ducarel

(1778 - 1855)

Though the place of Phillip John Ducarel in the history of Forest of Dean literature is at best marginal, having published only one piece of Forest of Dean work, he was a figure of some significance in the life of the Forest of Dean more generally. He was a magistrate, land owner and businessman, and he played a role in the Dean Forest Riots of 1831, issuing a warrant for the arrest of the Warren James (Nicholls, 1858, 11). He also swore in officers, and crucially for the

prosecutions that followed, it was Ducarel that read the riot act (Anstis, 1986, 114). He also gave evidence to The First and Second Reports of Dean Forest Commissioners in 1835, and, testament to his local significance, he has a memorial window dedicated to him in Newland church.

Ducarel was born in Calcutta[21] in 1778, the son of Gerard Gustavus Ducarel, who was working for the East India Company, and a local woman Elizabeth 'Bibi' Mizra (Bowyer, 2004) who Gerard married on arrival back in England. Philip grew up in Exmouth and continued to live there for some time into adulthood. Christie Arno (2013), suggests that it was during his later years in Devon that Ducarel came to know Thomas Poole, a friend of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and became involved in some way with Coleridge's circle. It is as yet unclear how Ducarel came to move to the Forest of Dean but he soon became an established part of the local gentry here. By the time he had moved to Newland he had already published two collections of poetry, *Poems* (1805), and *Poems Original and Translated* (1807). His *A Paraphrase of the Psalms* (1833), was followed in 1836 by his epic poem *De Wyrhale: A Tale of Dean Forest, in five Cantos,* his only work connected with the Forest of Dean.

The preface to the poem presents the local historical underpinning to the story linking it to two tombs, those of Jenkyn Wyral and Sir John Joyce, in All Saints Church, Newland. Ducarel refers to manuscripts held locally concerning the Wyral family but, tantalisingly, he says they give little detail regarding Jenkyn himself. Ducarel is thus at licence to create for himself Jenkyn Wyral's story, and that of Joyce, whilst at the same time weaving it into historical events and local topographical reality. Wyral becomes the eponymous 'De Wyrhale' of the story, the romantic tragic hero destined to be killed fighting for the Lancastrian cause at the battle of Tewkesbury. Joyce becomes 'De Joyes', father of Rosabelle, the object of De Wyrhale's affections. The story opens with Rosbaelle awaiting news of her father only to be told by De Wyrhale that De Joyes has betrayed the Lancastrian cause and switched sides to York. Although often static for

[21] I am indebted to Teresa Davies' genealogical research on Ducarel (unpublished at the time of writing) for the Reading the Forest project.

considerable periods, with much of the verse consisting of dialogue delivered whilst the characters are stationary, the poem is set in different locations across the Forest of Dean as it takes the reader from the centre of the wooded Forest to the shores of both Wye and Severn. Unlike Morse's tale, Ducarel's is full of specific local detail.

Ducarel takes delight in detailed description of the woodland scene with mention of specific tree species, ferns and the various animals inhabiting the woods:

> […] See all around the scene
> Is forest vast, umbrageous; mighty oak
> And beech point heavenward, and of soberest green
> And shade, dark yew, which the stout woodman's stroke
> Almost defies ; there heard, but oft unseen
> Pours the rough torrent, or the rippling brook;
> And there, amid the woodland, to the glade
> With fern and mingled heather wildly clad,
>
> From the close covert creeping, oft the deer,
> Timorous and fleet of foot, would safely stray;
> (Ducarel, 1836, 8-9)

The mention of deer affords Ducarel the opportunity to link with both history and poetic imagery as the royal sport of hunting deer in the Forest has been replaced by the wartime pursuit of man hunting man. As the story progresses the action moves to the village of Clearwell where De Wyrhale's company stable their horses in a cave. The area around the village in reality is the location of several ancient iron mines[22], and their inclusion here as a setting reinforces the relationship between the story and the real locations of the Forest. Rosabelle decides she must travel to Vigornia (Worcester) for safety and we follow her and her escort as they traverse the Forest, heading over Symonds Yat and the Coldwell Rocks to the River Wye and Goodrich, before boarding a

[22] Jonathan Wright (2018), owner of Clearwell Caves and secretary to the Royal Forest of Dean Freeminers Association suggests, based on Ducarel's description that 'He is referring to an un-mined churn which would have been such an amazing sight, by candlelight'

vessel to travel upstream to Worcester: all locations familiar to any readers that may have enjoyed the Wye Tour. The density of the 'mazy woods' (99), once again an echo of Camden, is a challenge to travel through for the party, but with the help of their guide, Wigran, the woods also offer protection from harm ('scathe') as they head for the Wye ('Vaga'):

> […] my care a path
> Shall point through secret maze yet undescried
> By prying eyes, till that secured from scathe
> We free the forest bounds, and Vaga's tide.
> (Ducarel, 1836, 97)

Again, here is the notion of a forest as a strange and terrifying place seen from outside, and a place all too easy to become lost in. For its inhabitants though it is a place that is familiar, known, easily navigated, and a refuge - or as Harry Beddington would put it many years later in regard specifically to the Forest of Dean, 'Harbouring through the years rebels from all quarters' (Beddington, 1977, 7). These *generic* forest associations are played out in *specific* Forest of Dean landscape settings further reinforced with engravings in the book at the start of each section (or canto). The engravings depict a local or regional scene relating to the story: the Newland Oak, Clearwell Cross, Goodrich Castle, Tewkesbury, and De Wyrhale's monument. Ducarel also includes numerous footnotes providing historical and regional context, including specifically about the Forest of Dean, again rooting this chivalric tale in real events and recognisable landscape.

Though De Wyrhale and most of the other protagonists are of the lordly or knightly class, Foresters lower in the feudal pecking order also appear. As De Wyrhale approaches Clearwell a bold Robin-Hood-like figure, later named as 'Hewling', appears, and is described as 'That gallant wight erect, of none afraid' (Ducarel, 1836, 115). He blows his hunting horn to summon his fellow Foresters, 'a motley band' (119), who emerge from the undergrowth. Their leader pledges his and his men's allegiance to De Wyrhale because he is a fellow Forester:

> Art thou not native born ? true forester
> To other will obedience scorn to pay—
> We love him not, we hate the foreigner.
> (Ducarel, 1836, 121)

Ducarel is at pains to explain in his footnote, perhaps reflecting his own experience having himself not long moved to the area, that 'foreigner', is used to describe anyone born outside of the Forest of Dean, and 'nor will he lose the appellation though he reside all his life amongst them, nor do they ever look on him in the same light with which they regard a native born' (228). This concern with authenticity of identity is again reflected by Hewling as he points out to Rosabelle she need not fear for her safety in the woods for 'Mortal sin it were, should foresters /Ere harm, pardie, so fair a child of Dean' (122). The Foresters according to Hewling have 'Stout hearts of brass', and are keen to join the fight with their 'Spirits untamed like wild-fires' (123). He explains how previously they had captured and killed some Yorkists because they had 'prophaned *our* ancient wood' (121) [my emphasis], here expressing that strong sense of ownership, or custodianship, that, as seen above, was also reflected by Morse: '*our* dear native woods staunch and free' (cited in Adams & Nancollas, 2012, 30) [my emphasis]. Further allusions are made to the character of the Foresters, and drawing on what must have been Ducarel's reading of the available historical sources, some familiar tropes appear. 'They say we are Pirates too', says Hewling, explained by Ducarel in his footnote as being due to their raids on Severn barges as described in *Bennet's History of Tewkesbury*, (and, as demonstrated above, previously having appeared in Camden). Unsurprisingly perhaps then that they are also described by Ducarel as 'Like fabled Satyrs […] that harbor the dark caves among' (Ducarel, 1836, 128), clearly drawing on Drayton's description in *Poly Olbion*, of Foresters as 'the Satyres', who with their stolen river goods 'Unto their wooddie Caves have carried them away' (Drayton, 1612, lines 29-42). Ducarel's band of Foresters also repair to their cave where 'Around were spoils collected from afar […] Full oft a harvest did broad Severn yield' (Ducarel, 1836, 129). This is a striking example of Forest of Dean literature's genealogy, descriptions taken from early-modern histories and topographies repeated and repurposed as

sources for poetry and fiction. Within the broader context of Ducarel's story in which these Foresters from more humble origins are seen to be as brave and worthy as the higher-ranking De Wyrhale, the descriptions of them as like 'Satyrs' engaged in effect in criminal behaviour, need not be read as pejorative, rather merely as a sign of their robust self-sufficiency, much like other fictionalised forest outlaw figures such as Robin Hood.

Ducarel in his role of magistrate had his own experience of Foresters' sense of proprietorship of the woods, and resistance to the imposition of any restrictions on this, during the Forest of Dean riots of 1831. It is notable that he was amongst fellow magistrates who lobbied for the commuting of the death sentence to transportation for one of the convicted rioters due to be hanged. Coming only a few years after the riots, *De Wyrhale*, could easily, written by a less sympathetic author, have seen the Forester's portrayed as a dangerous mob rather than simply rough and ready rogues. Ducarel's choice of historical setting did indeed allow him, through the voice of De Wyrhale, to describe a period in which '"Again Rebellion rears her horrid hand, And Civil discord desolates the land"' (52). In the same year as the Dean Forest Riots there was the more substantial Merthyr Tydfil uprising (libcom.org), in nearby South Wales, and three years later in 1834 the founders of the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers were on trial in Tolpuddle (Hampton, 1984, 463). There was then ample evidence, if an author chose to look for it, of rebellion by the labouring classes, but instead Ducarel's sympathy for the Forest's lower classes is clearly evident in his epic poem. This is a tale that, located in the Forest of Dean, affords place-specific historical colour, descriptions of named identifiable places geographically related to each other in ways that reflect their real locations. The description of the Foresters too, no doubt, drew on Ducarel's own experience of them as both landlord and magistrate, but was also directly informed by poetic mythic characterisations some two centuries old.

De Wyrhale, is an engaging tale with sufficient plot and character to carry the reader through its four hundred and twenty one verses and it was praised at the time as 'displaying the capabilities of a well-regulated mind', with action

that was ‘stirring and war-like throughout’ (*Morning Post*, 1836, 6c). With regards style, the same review likened it to Byron, though the reviewer notes that they preferred Ducarel. The mediaeval historical detail and the inclusion of very many references to classical mythology suggests Ducarel’s interest was in creating a respected piece of poetry for a readership educated to a level that would be able to appreciate it, including, one presumes, his acquaintances amongst the professional poets of the day. Educated local gentry would no doubt have appreciated the classical allusions too, as much as the regional references. Ducarel differs in this respect to Wickenden and Morse. Wickenden, no longer able to rely on his career in the pulpit for his living, would, as a result, have been in search of a wide popular readership, his writing in form and topic being commercially driven by the popular tastes of the day. The young Richard Morse appears to have written his two works as an exploration of a possible literary career before taking up a series of artisan trades as a more sustainable means to make a living. For Ducarel, with a secure livelihood from his land and commercial ventures, he was free to create work aspiring to more serious literary recognition, regardless of sales. As will be seen below, this was just as well as his epic poem set in the Forest of Dean does not appear to have been particularly well-received at the time locally, and much like his contemporaries Wickenden and Morse, Ducarel was destined to ultimately be largely forgotten in the Forest of Dean as an author. This was in contrast to a contemporary of all three, poet Catherine Drew.

Catherine Drew

(1784 - 1867)

Catherine Drew’s only collection of poems was first published in 1841, with only two other poems of hers currently known, both published in regional newspapers. It is Drew’s poems though that have resonated with Forest of Dean readers far more significantly than the extensive number of works by Wickenden, Morse’s two works, or Ducarel’s epic poem. Her popularity in the

Forest of Dean was hinted at by the publisher of the 1904 edition of her work. John Cooksey, co-founder of the *Dean Forest Mercury* in 1881 (Jurica, 1996c, 383), described Drew, at the time her first collection was published, as 'a person of some repute and influence at that time', her work being reissued again in 1904 due to 'Some of the older inhabitants, and former residents in the Forest of Dean, having expressed a desire to obtain the poems' (Cooksey in Drew, 1841, 2). The specificity of her work to the Forest, her admiration for working people like herself, and her plain direct style, did much to endear her to these local readers.

There was a considerable gap between the social position of Philip Ducarel and Catherine Drew, and indeed even between her and both Morse and Wickenden. According to her own words, Catherine was born in 1784 of 'poor working-people' (Drew, 1841, 5), her father a paper maker at Gunns Mills near Mitcheldean, her mother already a widow with eight children on meeting him. Catherine was taught to read and write by her father, enjoying only nine days at school before having to return home to take care of him after he became ill. At thirteen years old she began working as a farm labourer and at nineteen 'went to service' (6), as a domestic worker for her father's former employer. Her unashamed, brief yet detailed, and highly personal story, outlined in her Memoir (as it is titled at the preface to her poetry collection), contributed to the picture of her as an authentic labouring-class voice in, and of, the Forest of Dean. As Nicholls put it, she was 'a thoroughly satisfactory sister of her class' (Nicholls, 1863, 174). The humility and the plain Christian morality of her upbringing are themes evident in her poems too, here expressed in lines taken from 'The Days of My Childhood, or The Contrast' (Drew, 1841, 15):

> My parents were honest, although they were poor,
> And we liv'd in a cottage that had but one door;

And later in the same poem (16):

> I arose in the morn, like the lark, free from care,
> Though my labour was hard, and frugal my fare;

> Yet content was my lot, which is purchased by few,
> For vice, that tormentor, my heart never knew.

It is clear from these lines that, for Catherine Drew, the honesty and simplicity of her upbringing and her later working life are of greater value than financial wealth. This was, no doubt, part of her appeal to the Reverend Nicholls, concerned as he was with the spiritual welfare of his Forest flock. Drew is furthermore unsparing in her criticism of those who lose sight of where true value lies, as, for example, in her poem 'The Low Bred Forest Fop' (31-32), where she takes to task those who become 'all fashion, no weight', and who possess 'Gentility enough, and ability none'. Drew values substance over affectation, a position that would have won her many friends amongst the working people of the Forest, practical in their skills and livelihoods above all else. In 'The Days of My Childhood, or The Contrast', too, she reminds the rich that 'When your summoned away you must leave all behind' (17). For Catherine then a good life, a life of substance not mere appearance, is more valuable and worthy than a life of money and mere manners. Drew is clear, a simple rural life is better too than life in the city, especially London 'Where vice is cried up, and virtue's a name' (29). For her it is the hard-working labouring classes on whom the wealth and comfort of the rich and the city-dweller is built. 'Think how the miners labour under ground', she writes 'To aid your comforts in the crowded town' (19). In 'The Forest of Dean in Times Past, Contrasted with the Present', she again takes to task anyone who assumes airs and graces:

> That dress so gay, in city and in town,
> Remember that the sheep that we have shore,
> Have worn that coat of yours, but just before.
> (Drew, 1841, 23)

As with the 'Forest Fop', Drew, on behalf of the labouring-class Forester, takes the opportunity to prick any sense of self-inflation of those who might consider themselves socially superior to the working man or woman. Even their fine clothes, lest they take themselves too seriously and consider themselves

too superior, are in effect mere hand me downs – from sheep. Drew's admirable ability to, in a few lines, capture the connection between the labouring-classes and those that benefit from their labour, is reminiscent of William Cobbett's lines[23] in *The Political* Register, in 1816, where he reminds his readers that:

> Elegant dresses, superb furniture [etc.] all these spring from *labour.* Without the Journeyman and the labourer none of them could exist.
> (Cobbett, 1816 cited in Hampton, 1984, 403).

Drew's questioning of the conventional value of financial and social status represents a kind of inversion of social hierarchy that would become a signature of later Forest of Dean literature. The Forest's workers are the creators of the wealth and comforts of those more normally considered their social betters. More than this, the working people are the honest moral superiors of those who rely on them, those with practical skills better than those who may have money but 'ability none' (Drew, 1841, 32). Work and self-sufficiency become here, in the work of this popular Forest poet, valued as an integral element of Forest identity. Un-earned wealth, mere appearance, is no substitute.

There is much like this in Drew's poems to endear her to the working people of the nineteenth-century Forest of Dean, relying on their own labour for a living, identifying with the morality of church and chapel, and identifying themselves as Foresters. And lest she be mistakenly taken as simply a po-faced moralist, her position is in fact more temperate. Not only does she admit to being grateful of the odd illicitly felled tree for firewood (below), in regard to drinking alcohol for example she merely advocates moderation rather than abstinence. In 'The Forest Improvements - A Song', she extols the virtues of taking a drink (though not getting drunk):

[23] Cobbett notes in *Rural Rides* (Cobbett, 1966, 31), that workmen in the paper mill near Weston under Penyard (outside, but on the edge of the Forest) take *The Political Register.* The mill was owned by the same family that owned Gunns Mills (Harris and Angel, 1975, 31; Jurica, 1996e, 97) where Drew's father worked. It is tantalising to think that Drew may have had access to Cobbett's newspaper.

> There's Jones, of the Hart[24], or his neat behave'd wife
> Will pump you a quart, which will give you fresh life;
> Then drink success to the Forest, my boys,
> And off to your labour, and don't make a noise.
> (Drew, 1841, 33-34)

Here, Drew is speaking very clearly of her time and place, mentioning her local pub landlord by name, with a direct address to her readers (in this case the male ones at least), and expressing a sense of loyalty and cheer-leading for the Forest. This was a very real, contemporary Forest of Dean, a place of recognisable businesses, buildings, and people, rather than an idealised and generic rural location that could be anywhere. This is a far cry from a simple pastoral countryside.

Of the eight poems in her only published collection, six directly concern the Forest of Dean. Compared to Ducarel, and to some extent his comparatively less florid contemporaries Wickenden and Morse, the poems in Drew's collection with verses written in a conversational, plain English, in simple rhyming couplets, are far more accessible to a wider readership including literate Foresters. Apart from two straightforward classical references, one to Phoebus (representing the sun) and one to Philomel (the nightingale) in 'The Days of My Childhood, or The Contrast', her references are to the concrete tangible world, or to an equally concretised God, both recognisable and at hand to her contemporary readers. Hers is a poetry that talks of the Forest of Dean simply rooted in her own experience and knowledge of it, and expressed through a deep love of and loyalty to it as a place:

> So the Forest of Dean, is my native I own,
> I prefer it to either city or town;
> (Drew, 1841, 15)

And in later in the collection,

[24] Being The White Hart Inn, a pub still open today on the edge of Cinderford near where Drew lived as an adult.

> Dean's ancient forest, now shall be my theme,
> My heart does leap to own the much loved name
> (Drew, 1841, 17)

Her longest poem in the collection, 'The Forest of Dean in Times Past, Contrasted with the Present', given an original date of 1835 by Nicholls (1858, 146), details the history, and then recent development, of the Forest of Dean. This is a poem that is utterly and inescapably rooted in the Forest. It opens with her remembering her youth, enjoying the natural wealth of the Forest, its birds, flowers and groves. Soon though she turns to the Forest as a lived and worked environment, both past and present, a lived place rather than an individual experience of nature. She is prompted by the landscape to contemplate a time when the Forest was sparsely populated by only 'a few freeminers' (18), who, she's told, would think nothing of taking an occasional deer for food and the odd oak tree too for themselves. Here again we see Drew's deviation from an overly rigid interpretation of Christian morality. Far from criticising these locally *fluid* attitudes to the law, she admits that, regarding the felled timber '[..] oft have I been glad the crop to see, For that would make some firewood for me' (18). Drew is demonstrating her affinity with a notion that the Forest population should have a right to a level of self-sufficiency by their own labours and gumption in exploiting the Forest's resources. She reflects this self-reliance and work ethic a few lines later as, prompted by evidence etched into the landscape, she further contemplates the lives of the miners who came before:

> But noble miners, there have been, I ken,
> By their old works, stout able-bodied men,
> They'd not the knowledge then, that now they've got,
> To work by steam – hand labour was their lot.
> (Drew, 1841, 18)

The poem continues to explore the landscape, both natural and manmade, and skilfully switches between the Forest of the past and the contemporary changes she sees happening around her. She explains the origins of the Freeminers rights (18), then within a few dozen lines brings the reader

immediately up to date with her account of the influx of outside capital to the Forest 'But now there's tyranny enough I know, And foreigners over we free miners crow' (20). As much as she speaks up for recognition of working people's labour, and the rights of her fellow-Foresters (note too how she writes 'we free miners', including herself a woman) she also recognises the benefits that progress and outside capital brings:

> Rail-roads you see, and tunnel through Hay hill;
> From Bilson coal works, down to Bullo Pill.
> Protheroe! thy name is to the Forest dear,
> For many thousands thee has ventured here;
> Deeper thy pits than any before,
> The lowest vein of coal to explore.
> (Drew, 1841, 25)

Here Drew has named local contemporary industrialist Edward Protheroe who brought capital investment and new technology into Forest mining, ore extraction, and its transportation (Jurica, 1996d). She also sings his praises, quite literally, in the chorus to 'The Forest Improvements – A Song', 'But Protheroe's the man, and I'll sing to his praise, And we'll crown him the king of the Forest my boys' (Drew, 1841, 32). David Adams, referring briefly to Drew in his work on Morse, very tentatively suggests that we *might* take her praise of Protheroe as ironic, though he ultimately concedes that this was more likely to be an accurate reflection of her genuine gratitude to someone who brought material progress and jobs to the Forest (Adams & Nancollas, 2012, 4). Whilst she recognises that 'The forest now is numerous got of late, Since monied men come here to speculate' (Drew, 1841, 25), this is as much a lament for simpler times when 'Men loved their masters – masters loved their men' (25), as any cry against social injustice as such. Drew in this respect tends towards the socially conservative and throughout her published work is an advocate of the dutiful, stolid working life as a route to a morally rewarding existence. Drew advocates, for women in particular, a safe and conservative life. As she warns in 'The Low Bred Forest Fop', care must be taken to avoid being led astray. Heaven forbid they should risk moving to London, the dire consequences outlined by Drew in

'The Fair Maid of the Forest's Three Days' Tour of London'. In Drew's opinion it is far better to be 'safe at your own cottage door' (30). In these respects here conservatism was not dissimilar to other work by labouring class women of the period. As Donna Landry argues in *The Muses of Resistance*, the more radically informed and socially challenging work of labouring class writers such as Elizabeth Hands and Ann Yearsley in the previous century, gave way to work that demonstrated more of an acceptance of the current social order, a celebration of individual piety and a creeping jingoism (Landry, 1990, 273-280). In 'A Word To The Chartists', commenting on the Newport Rising of 1839, Drew chastises Frost and the Welsh for their rebellion, instructing them to 'Return to your duty, it is the best plan', and to 'Fear your God, and your lawful sovereign obey, 'Tis the way to a be happy by night and by day' (36). In what seems to be a wilful act of historical amnesia, she conveniently forgets the 1831 riots in the Forest when she forthrightly states in 'The Forest Improvements – A Song', that 'No chartists, nor radical, is here to be seen' (34) apparently.

Drew then is no radical; rather she is a poet who reflects her own perception of the times and her own moral position in respect to her own economic and social situation and those of her fellow Foresters. She is at pains to point out that money in itself is no indicator of moral superiority. Drew's view is that the working men and women, the labouring poor, should value what they do have and endure, and in some respects this alone makes them better people than the shallow and sometimes morally questionable rich.

It is though her description of the Forest, its history, and the detail of what was happening around her that surely is the primary cause of her popularity. Though there are aspects of her work that, in chime with broader poetic tastes of the period tend towards a simple celebration of nature and the pastoral innocence of rural life, hers is poetry that is tied irrevocably to the Forest of Dean: it could not be transplanted to another place. Her collection of work, modest in scale as it is, should indeed receive the attention of scholars continuing to reveal the forgotten contributions of nineteenth-century female poets and authors. As a female Forest author her experience of being a working

woman and published in later life (her collection was published when she was aged fifty seven), would be shared by later female Forest authors: Winifred Foley was aged sixty on publication of *A Child in the Forest*; Joyce Latham aged fifty when her collection *Puzzlewood and Other Poems*, was published. It is however, the very specificity of Drew's six Forest of Dean poems, with their references to named places, events and people in the Forest, that makes her work a significant building block of Forest of Dean literature.

Only two works are known to exist beyond her published collection: 'The Unlettered Muse'[25], a reflection by the seventy year old poet on a visit to Chepstow Castle, was published in the *Chepstow Weekly Advertiser*, in 1859; and 'A Poem By An Octogenarian', published in *The Bristol Mercury*, in 1865 and also by *The Monmouthshire Beacon*. Whilst clearly these newspapers would have brought her some wider attention, as did her inclusion in Nicholls' work of 1858, the list of subscribers to her 1841 collection are almost exclusively Forest of Dean residents. Hers was a poetry then that, despite her two poems published in the regional press, seems to have been primarily enjoyed by readers in the Forest of Dean, a readership whose pleasure was derived from a recognition of the history, places and people of the Forest of Dean in which they lived.

The Birth of Forest of Dean Literature

To what extent these four authors knew of each other's work is still unclear although it is possible that, through the pages of the local press and simple word of mouth, they may well have done. Whilst Drew appears to have lived in the Forest her whole life, Morse soon after publication of his work moved to Gloucester, and Wickenden lived variously between London and Etloe. Ducarel's social status may or may not have prevented him mixing with a woman of Drew's class. None of that of course would necessarily prevent them from accessing copies of each other's work. David Adams (2016, 26), suggests that in

[25] I'm once again grateful to Teresa Davies who came across this and the following poem in the course of her research for the Reading the Forest project.

the case of Wickeden and Morse their families were certainly connected through marriage and family friends, so the two authors may well have known each other. Despite this, and the similarities in all four authors' characterisations of the Forest and Foresters, there is (as yet) no evidence to suggest that these writers were a part of any sort of cohesive Forest of Dean literary scene or school. What they did have in common, however, was they were living and writing through a period of dramatic change in both the Forest of Dean and wider world.

In the opening chapter of *Warren James and the Dean Forest Riots* (1986), Ralph Anstis sums up the local situation leading up to and around the time of the riots in 1831. He explains that, in a series of reports at the end of the previous century, the cause of the parlous state of the Forest's timber reserves had been identified as poor administration, poorly managed grazing, and exploitation for mining. A series of administrative and land management reforms, including enclosure, began to be enacted in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and these were considered to be one of the causes of the Forest's 1831 riots. Other developments saw traditional working practices being further eroded. A network of tram-roads, known as railways or 'rail-roads', as described by Drew above, that carried horse-drawn trucks for the transportation of iron ore, coal and stone, was in this period spreading throughout the Forest. The first of these had been established by a local mine-owner, James Teague, in the face of opposition from the crown; a sign of the continued tension between the Forest as timber reserve versus the increasing importance of its coal and iron industries. The tram-roads soon became recognised as a means to open up the Forest's coal and iron reserves to a wider market, so were approved by a series of Parliamentary acts. This new transport network[26] attracted outside investors in both the tram-roads themselves and in the collieries that provided the traffic for them (Paar, 1965, 12-28).

[26] In the latter half of the century the lines would be converted to steam and became part of a more extensive network linking the Forest's resources and people to the national rail network.

In 1838 the Dean Forest Mines Act provided firm statutory recognition and definition of Freeminers' rights in law, however, ironically, this formalisation brought immense change to traditional mining practices in the Forest. The act made it possible for Freeminers to sell their interests in a mine or mines to outside, non-Freeminer interests. The holding of mines by industrialists from outside the Forest through concessions from Freeminers was now possible and recognised in law (Hart, 1971, 268). This opening up of the Forest's coal and iron reserves brought an influx of outside capitalist investment, development, and a subsequent change in working practices. The way, in effect, became clear for the (near) full-scale take over and development of mining in the Forest by outside interests. The act also allowed in law the employment of non-Freeminers underground too[27]. These changes meant that during this period mining began to shift from a regime of rural artisanship to a large scale capitally intensive extractive industry. Though as late as 1871 still just over 70% of its resident colliers had been born in the Forest of Dean (Fisher, 1981, 56), the area's demand for labour as whole, with the expansion in iron mining and processing, saw the population of the Hundred of St Briavels more than double between 1801 and 1841 (107). As Chris Fisher concludes in the final chapter of *Custom, Work and Market Capitalism: The Forest of Dean Colliers, 1788-188*, 'the Forest was not separate, in the nineteenth century, from the forces which were at work in British society at large' (172), and this was a century that in its first half saw periods of national economic depression, riots by agricultural labourers, and in Europe a series of revolutions. This was a period then of increasing industrialisation, population movement, and political upheavals at home and abroad, and this was the context in which our first Forest of Dean authors were writing.

[27] With the act also came a subtle alteration to the tradition, with Freeminers now no longer required to be the son of an existing Freeminer (Fisher, 1981, 30). Instead, any male over the age of twenty one, having been born in the Hundred of St Briavels and having worked underground here for a year and a day, could start or take on ownership of a mine. This in effect expanded access to these economic rights.

It is Catherine Drew's poems that give us the most straightforward and direct account of those times (Adams & Nancollas, 2012, 4), rich in local detail including specific places, people, history and culture of the Forest of Dean, as well as its natural environment. Considered alongside Wickenden, Morse and Ducarel, it is her modest body of work that perhaps speaks most clearly to us today, about the changes the Forest was undergoing, a simple account of Forest history both before and during her lifetime. Hers is also an accessible voice unclouded by complex poetic style, language, imagery or classical allusions. Hers is a poetic voice that was arguably most in step with what Wordsworth had advocated some forty years earlier in his 1798 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth, et al., 1991). He had described his and Coleridge's poems as 'experiments', to see to what extent the 'language of conversation of the middle and lower classes of society', could be effectively used in poetry (Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1798). Developing this further in his preface to the 1800 edition (Wordsworth, 1800), he critiques more extensively overly complex poetic style that focuses on metre and language to the exclusion of clear communication of thought and feeling. He argues for the use of the same language in poetry as that used in prose. This is the language that Drew uses.

What Catherine Drew does share with her contemporary Forest poets and authors is her pre-occupation with place, with the Forest of Dean. Whilst Wickenden's works, in particular his novels, happily travelled far and wide (both geographically and in terms of subject-matter), he was 'Bard of the Forest' – Drew was the 'Forest poetess' (Nicholls, 1858, 146). Wickenden's Forest was often a more generic forest of 'romantic glades' (Wickenden, 1850, 1), but it was also where his rambunctious horse race took place set amongst real recognisable Forest locations. His race was watched by 'hardy Foresters' (176), and featured the singing of local songs and speaking of Forest dialect. Morse's small body of work too, whilst most of it bore little significant connection to the Forest of Dean as a distinctive place (even arguably *The Forest Marauders*), it did crucially include 'The Forester's Song', as well as 'On a View of St Paul's Church, Park-End', and 'Yorkley City, in the Forest of Dean', both of these latter two

poems concerning specific local places. Like Drew, Morse conveyed in his 'The Forester's Song', that local sense of independence and direct relationship with the crown. Ducarel's Forest-set epic poem, the most literary complex in terms of structure, language and imagery, was crystal clear in signalling where it was set, not least through its engravings of local scenes. The period the story was set in may have been historically distant for Ducarel's readers but it's portrayal of Foresters with their 'Stout hearts of brass', and 'Spirits untamed like wild-fires' (Ducarel, 1836, 123), coming only five years after the 1831 Forest riots, and the very same year that a meeting to discuss ending common grazing rights was broken up by a mob (Herbert, 1996b, 374), would have resonated with readers (local or otherwise) who knew anything about the Forest of Dean's recent history. Even so, the distinctive Forest they depicted was arguably beginning to become something of the past. In reading their work we are reading a Forest that was becoming increasingly one of the literary imagination. Though rooted in real places and real history, and descriptive of a distinctive Forest, their literary version of the Forest was, arguably, already developing into a mythologised one.

Chris Fisher suggests that the changes in the local economy and in traditional working practices led to a change in the very nature of the Foresters themselves around this time. They 'had been feared as a savage and lawless people', but by mid-century were being seen as merely curiosities. If the Forest was still seen as 'odd, it was no longer dangerous', and instead it had 'become a coal and iron district much like any other' (Fisher, 1981, 54-55). If this was indeed the case, these founding authors of Forest of Dean literature were playing their part in perpetuating an image of the Forest and Foresters that was beginning to become dethatched from social reality. These four writers then, sometimes drawing on generic ideas about forests and forest dwellers, as well as real recent local history and their own knowledge of the Forest, were perpetuating a particular image of the Forest and Foresters that arguably was rapidly becoming more myth than reality. In this respect they were much like the Forest authors of just over a century later who would write about a Forest of coal mines, sheep

badgers and strong Forest dialect, just as these too were rapidly becoming part of a past Forest of Dean. Both were seeking to capture something that was being lost and in so doing keep a cultural memory of it alive.

The extent to which these four nineteenth-century Forest authors' work made a significant impact on the Forest of Dean population itself, and how the Forest was perceived more widely, or they directly influenced future Forest authors, is also unclear. As has been shown Drew's work would be the only one to be repeatedly cited by future Forest authors, and be reissued. Whilst her work seems to have achieved some level of local popularity the 1904 edition of her collection states (2) that only one hundred[28] copies were produced of the original 1841 edition. Amongst the subscribers to the first edition were Theophilus Trotter the father of Ada M. Trotter who would go on to write two Forest of Dean novels in the 1880's, and James Teague[29] who only three years after Drew published his own collection of poems[30]. It is a tantalising thought to picture the young Trotter inspired to write having picked up her father's copy of Drew, or the elderly James Teague deciding to finally publish his collection after seeing Drew's work in print.

Both Drew's and Morse's work was cited by Nicholls (1858), and notably both were included in a public lecture (mentioned above) that he gave on the Forest of Dean at the National School in Blakeney in 1863 (*Gloucester Journal*, 1863). Future scholarship may be able to establish if, as a result of Nicholls' talk to teachers, either Drew's or Morse's poems were taught in local schools. Though not mentioned by Nicholls, the prolific Wickenden was described with an expectation that he would certainly be familiar to the readers of the *Gloucester Journal* (1851) as it announced his latest publication. In the same newspaper in 1865, Wickenden was mentioned alongside Drew and Morse as part of a review of Gloucestershire literature through the ages. It is a notable

[28] Over two hundred subscribers are listed. If the 1904 claim was indeed accurate this suggests that over half of those listed as subscribers did so without expectation of receiving a personal copy of the book. On close examination there are several members of the same household listed so it seems safe to assume that they received one copy for the family.
[29] Third son of the James Teague mentioned above (Anstis, 1990, 173)
[30] Only one of which, 'To the Severn', had any local connection.

absence that Ducarel was not included in the list. If the scathing review in the *Gloucestershire Chronicle* (1836), on publication of *De Wyrhale* was any reflection of how his work was also received in the Forest, it is no surprise that his poetry was not taken to Forester's hearts in the same way that Catherine Drew's was:

> As chroniclers of the county of Gloucester, it is our duty to notice this poem, but we must request our readers to conjecture our motives for declining to say more than the vignette illustrations prefixed to each of the five cantos, and drawn by Miss Yorke, are extremely pretty.
> (*Gloucester Chronicle*, 1836)[31]

Despite their many differences in how they wrote and how they were received by the local, and in Wickenden's case national, reading public, what these four authors had in common was that their depiction of the Forest of Dean was informed by their own experience and knowledge of it. They were the first to write from their own experience of growing up in, or coming to live in, the Forest. Theirs was a depiction, to varying degrees, of a more specific and

[31] On the preceding column of the same page is this hilarious critique at Ducarel's expense:
'POETRY.
TO DEAN FOREST
(original)
Romantic Dean—unhappy is the doom
That hath this year involved thee in its gloom
First of thy woes, the cruel Five Reports
Assail thy deer, thy customs and thy Courts;
Thy Warden dies—no more to be restor'd
A Treasury *Sub* now reigns the Forest Lord: -
Next ***** with ruthless hand thy union breaks
And other unions o'er thy ruin makes:-
But oh! last shame and sorrow of the time
******* takes thee as a theme for rhyme,
And sings about thee in so strange a strain
That none who read will bear thy name again.
TO DE WYRHALE.
In life thy fate was hard—in death far worse,
To the subject of *******'s verse'.

distinctive Forest of Dean. This preoccupation with place, (as well as in the case of Wickenden, Morse and Drew inclusion of elements of autobiographical detail), reflected a broader appetite for literature and poetry rooted in particular and recognisable places, and an appetite for writing that gave insights into other individual lives.

Fiona Stafford, in *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (2010), in a section titled 'The Discovery of Local Truth', describes how the success of Robert Burns signalled a shift in literary tastes towards work rooted in a particular region or place. She also cites Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent,* and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads,* as important examples in the establishing of poetry and 'fiction of a "particular locality" as an important form of the nineteenth century' (20). For all of these high profile authors producing this type of work (such as Sir Walter Scott, and later Thomas Hardy), there was also what B. P. Birch describes as 'a galaxy of less eminent, less fashionable or less prolific', writers who also set their work in recognisable regions but who were often simply thought of as '"local" authors' (Birch, 1980, 348). As W. J. Keith (1988, 19), put it in regard to this developing trend 'The general is giving way to the particular', with the influence of, among others, writers such as William Gilpin[32] helping to cultivate a taste for aesthetic appreciation of landscapes and places. Improved transport and improved communication were also allowing people to see the fascinating difference between their own and other regions (Bentley, 1973, 12), and the wider world as the British Empire expanded. This recognition and understanding of difference, the specificity of places, provided an impetus to record and classify the specifics of particular places. This is most clearly exemplified by Nicholls in regard the Forest of Dean with his detailed study, but too by these four earlier authors' wish to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Forest. Stafford argues that around the same time developments in philosophy led to an increasing emphasis on individual experience and the valuing of a perception of the world through the senses. Whilst such individual

[32] Gilpin himself skirted the Forest region in 1770, an account of which was later published in 1782 as *Observations on the River Wye*.

experience meant that each person was in effect unique, there was at the same time, says Stafford 'a desire for connection' (Stafford, 2010, 22). Just such connection could be had through poetry, novels and biography that offered insights into the individual experience and inner world of other people. Stafford argues that the individual experiences of childhood in particular, and the perceptions of the environment and nature, were increasingly being seen as crucial in the formation of the adult and as such a necessary topic for the author and poet too. This can certainly be traced in the work of these early Forest authors' work. Wickenden's repeated inclusion of his early biography, and his origins as a poet; Drew's 'Memoir' at the start of her collection, and her prominent presence as an individual observer of nature and landscape in her poetry; and Morse's impulse to include the description of himself as 'a Self-Taught Forest Youth' (1836, 1), suggest that these authors were in step with the times and the developing taste for reading about individual experience and biographical origins. Part of these developments was also during the nineteenth century a developing interest in local dialects.

Forest Dialect in Nineteenth-Century Forest of Dean Literature

William Wickenden's detailed transcription of the sound of Forest dialect in *A Queer Book* (1850), spoke to a developing demand for literary work that described specific places, as well as to what was a growing interest in dialect. Jane Hodson and Alex Broadhead (2013), have done extensive work surveying the inclusion of such dialect in British fiction in the period 1800-1836. They identify that dialect tended to be included in 'satires or fictional autobiographies', and that the 'dialect-speaking characters are part of the cross-section of society the hero encounters' (321). In this respect Wickenden's *A Queer Book* (1850), is a typical example, (if published a little outside Hodson and Broadhead's survey period), of satire and fictional biography, and his dialect-speaking Foresters are indeed some of the characters he, as hero of the book, encounters. They are robust, rustic characters but by no means lacking in bravery or in any way less intelligent than Wickenden as he appears in the story.

Local dialects had started to be of interest to county historians and as part of studies seeking to capture rural folklore and traditional songs, and increasingly it became an object of study in its own right.[33] A list of Gloucestershire dialect words appeared, for example, in the *Gloucester Journal*, in 1869. The writer of the list makes no great claims for the purpose of his piece other than it being for 'the interest of local readers'. The writer acknowledges that language is 'affected by social and political changes', and that this is resulting in the 'gradual disappearance from ordinary use of many expressive terms'. This growing interest in dialect is accompanied at the very same moment by a narrative of its disappearance: at the moment of threat there is interest in recording and preserving it. This narrative of the loss of dialect is one that sees its disappearance as symbolic of a wider erosion of an older England, and in regard to dialect in particular education was seen as a chief culprit. As the editor (Anon, 1877), of *Legends, tales, and songs in the dialect of the peasantry of Gloucestershire, with several ballads and a glossary of words,* explains, the work of recording rural dialect was a means of capturing one element of this disappearing culture, and education was playing a part in its disappearance:

> The Editor would also mention the fact that the Government schoolmaster is abroad, and that it is likely the broad Saxon dialect now in use in the rural districts of the county will gradually give way to School Board training, and the objection of the ploughman who refused to send his son to the village school because he was taught to spell "taturs" with a "p" will be over-ruled.
> (Anon, 1877, vi)

[33] The English Dialect Society, formed in the 1870s, in their *Bibliographical List* (Skeat and Nodal eds., 1877, 51), note several works that had been published wholly or partly concerning Gloucestershire dialect. The earliest was the inclusion of Gloucestershire dialect within Marshall's *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire,* in 1789. Forest of Dean dialect words appeared in *A Glossary of Provincial Words Used in Herefordshire and Some of the Adjoining Counties* (Anon, 1839). The first work wholly concerned with Gloucestershire's dialect was *A Glossary of Provincial Words Used in Gloucestershire* (1851), similar works appearing in 1868 and 1870. The Society itself published its own *Glossary of Dialect and Archaic Words Used in the County of Gloucester*, in 1890 (Robertson).

Dialect was being eroded, soon to be eradicated altogether, by an education system that saw it as something to be overcome, a symbol of poor educational attainment, and a rural lack of civilisation. Whilst for some, Its loss might be something to be lamented, its disappearance a sign of general deterioration of a stable, romanticised, older rural order; for others, Nicholls amongst them, its loss was a sign of general progression towards greater civilization and development.

Nicholls' 1868 hearty recreation of an amusing conversation in dialect between two Foresters, at the end of *The Personalities of the Forest of Dean*, is followed by him commenting that this type of speech was now 'somewhat of the past' (Nicholls, 1868, 190). For Nicholls this is far from something to be lamented, rather he regrets that it can still be found at all in some more out of the way parts of the Forest. Nicholls sees its disappearance as a positive indication of development in the Forest, adding that 'few districts have improved more rapidly in social civilisation than this neighbourhood has done' (190). Nicholls, for all his fascination with the Forest of Dean, considered dialect a sign of general backwardness, and poor morality. To add weight to his point he comments on the same page that, unless due care and attention is paid by the crown and clergy in their administration of the district, it would 'fall back into the barbarous state' (190), that the Forest population was in at the beginning of the century: a state in which dialect was more prevalent. Nicholls' concern for the people of the district, and his work in establishing schools in the Forest, was such that he considered the continued use of dialect as a brake on local people's ability to advance themselves educationally and socially. Education was, in part, a means to learn how to speak a standard English which was, during the course of the nineteenth century, becoming ever more clearly codified, and at the same time was being ascribed the highest social value (Hackert, 2012; Agha, 2003; Burton and Ruthven, 2009). It is notable in this respect that Catherine Drew chose not to write in or include any Forest dialect in her published poetry.

Catherine Drew's poems lamented, to some extent, the passing of the old ways of life in the Forest, but she was also in her poems broadly supportive of its economic development, and was positive, for example, about the new school in her neighbourhood of Cinderford. In wishing to demonstrate her native Forest identity in the most positive light, part of a forward looking modernity, in sympathy with Nicholls' point of view, she writes in standard English. This may have been a strategic decision to ensure her work was accessible to the widest readership, and she may also have wanted to avoid her work being seen as simply rustic dialect poetry. As a labouring-class woman she may instead have wanted to showcase her educational attainment. For William Wickenden, meanwhile, confident in his educational achievements, his professional status as a member of the Clergy, and having already achieved some significant literary success, the inclusion of dialect was a canny response to a developing literary taste for local colour in the popular novels of the time.

This is in contrast to another author of Forest of Dean literature who was to deploy Forest dialect in her work later in the century. Author and journalist Ada M. Trotter would use dialect too as an indication of specific location, local colour, and comic effect, but less as a means of expressing camaraderie as for a signification of class distinction. In Trotter's work, her middle and upper class protagonists are clearly differentiated from those minor characters who come from the dialect-speaking, local labouring classes. In her first (of two) Forest-set novels, *Heaven's Gate* (1886)[34], her use of dialect does contribute to its rooting in the specificity of the Forest. It is also, however, used by her as a clear indicator of the educational inferiority of the local working-classes, with their 'slow Saxon brains' (Trotter, 1886, 225). In one short and telling example of her use of dialect, she describes the assembled Foresters as narrow of both mind and experience:

> "I be gwine to vote for Thomas Hughes," they doggedly asserted. "I baint agwain to vote for 'vurriners'"
> (Trotter, 1886, 232)

[34] Published under the pen name of Lawrence Severn

'Vurriners', [foreigners] here indicates anyone from outside of the Forest, and Trotter's use of it here, in the mouth of her Forest characters is used to indicate a rural narrow mindedness. She describes, sarcastically, any of the Foresters having travelled beyond the Forest being seen by their fellows as possessing substantial experience of the world. Trotter's dialect-speaking Foresters display none of the native whit or ingenuity of Wickenden's Foresters, Jack Prosser or Bill Proctor, they are instead rustic simpletons. She is at pains, however, to indicate that this is not a denigration of Foresters in general. Some of her better off, educated protagonists display a distinct pride in their own Forest identity. One of them, William, from a middle-class family, describes himself, in inclusive terms, as a Forester: '"*We* [my emphasis] are pretty well pure Saxons in the Forest of Dean"' (23). William also takes delight in singing along with the working-class Foresters in a rendition of the same song that Wickenden's Forester's sang in *A Queer Book* (1860), '"For we are the Jovial Foresters"'[35] (Wickenden, 1850, 184; Trotter, 1886, 230), Trotter's rendition notably not in dialect. William's identification as a Forester does not include any use of dialect, he is thus, in Trotter's world, clearly a significant cut above his lower class, dialect-speaking neighbours. They, the Forest-dialect-speaking, working-class villagers are portrayed as intellectually, physically, and morally inferior. This is exemplified in one particular incident.

At the start of a race, (unlike Wickenden's, Trotter's one being on foot), in *Heaven's Gate*, Oxford-educated Crawford, and Lord Orford are both lined up against local labourer Jumping Jim. Crawford is taller than both of them, and goes on to charitably help Jumping Jim win the race. Orford is described as 'a perfect Apollo; Jumping Jim an absurd figure' (163). Jumping Jim is child-like, to

[35] In the same passage the Foresters also sing George Riddler's Oven, a traditional Gloucestershire song often associated specifically with the Forest of Dean. Trotter states that the song was found in a cupboard in The Speech House at the time of Charles II (Trotter, 1886, 233), and was supposed to have some political meaning. A detailed analysis of the song's lyrics and their seventeenth-century political meanings can be found in the *Cheltenham Examiner* (1883), however this reading has since been discredited and the lyrics described by the Gloucestershire Society (2019), as an amalgam of other songs. The song also appears in F. W. Harvey's opera script *Devil's Chapel* (Harvey, 1943), written for the BBC.

be pitied and speaks in Forest dialect. The speaking of Forest dialect in Trotter's work is used as an indication of mental, physical, and moral inferiority, in contrast to the standard English speaking Crawford's morally superior, muscular Christianity. The dialect-speaking Foresters are minor characters within the book, the standard-English speakers the main protagonists. In a later incident, in the same book, young William is trapped underground with a group of Forest colliers. Here yet again, he strongly identifies as a Forester, but again, class-wise and language-wise, he is differentiated from the common, dialect-speaking Foresters around him. It is William, fit to be a leader of men, who must provide inspirational leadership: '"We are all Foresters; we've got the grit to die like true men"' (298). In Trotter's book then it is only the speaker of standard English who is equipped with the appropriate intellectual and moral fortitude to lead in times of crisis. William identifies repeatedly as a Forester, but does not speak the dialect: for Trotter there is no contradiction in identifying as a Forester and *not* speaking Forest dialect. Trotter's position regarding dialect is similar in this respect to that of Nicholls': dialect as something that should wither away if the population is suitably educated.

One of the recognised problems of deploying dialect in literature is that of situating dialect speech within a standard English narrative. Where description, interior thoughts, narrative action and much speech, is in standard English, the use of dialect by only some of the characters can come to highlight their difference (Short, 1991, 175). With standard English perceived as indicative of higher social status and educational attainment, characters speaking in dialect may immediately be perceived as subordinate. In Trotter's case, this appears to have been deliberately done to indicate their subordinate class position. In Wickenden too, dialect indicates a difference between himself and his Forest characters, however he is happy, as a character within the story, to adopt it as an expression of his Forest roots, and in effect as a demonstration of his solidarity with his Forest dialect-speaking characters. Thomas Hardy worried that the use of dialect in his own novels could get in the way of '"the proper balance of a true representation by unduly insisting upon the grotesque

element”” (Hardy cited in Bentley, 1973, 27). He was concerned that dialect as form would occupy his reader’s attention at the expense of the content of the character’s thoughts expressed in dialect. John Short, writing about Hardy’s use of dialect, even admitted that he found it ‘embarrassing to read’, one solution he suggests being to write entirely in dialect (Short, 1991, 175). This is, of course, precisely what Harry Beddington chose to do in his books about the Forest (see below).

Looking in more detail at the historical context in which the authors of Forest of Dean literature chose to use dialect, a more complex and contradictory picture, particularly in regard to the status of dialect during the nineteenth century, begins to emerge. As English was becoming increasingly standardised, and considered the only correct form of English, at the same time there was a fascination with dialect, including some interest in seeking to preserve its use. Larry McCauley (2001), describes changing motives for a growing and wide-ranging interest (scholars but also clergymen, school masters, writers, gentry) in dialect, and dialect in literature, during the period. Whilst early efforts were antiquarian in nature, seeking to make a record of dialect for posterity (much like Nicholls’ impulse), by the end of the century experts were looking to actively preserve its use. McCauley suggests that Richard Garnett’s essay *English Dialects* (1836), signaled the beginnings of this change in attitude (notable here for its contradiction of Nicholls’ inference above) when he noted that ‘though obsolete’, in terms of a written form, dialect was ‘not barbarous’ (Garnett cited in McCauley, 2001, 290). By the middle of the nineteenth century McCauley says, a number of linguists were arguing that dialect actually represented the very roots of modern English, and for the Victorians, this was an important element in their sense of identity. For them, their Englishness was considered to be rooted in an Anglo-Saxon past and thus, these older dialect forms became a means of denoting true English authenticity (292). Ada M. Trotter had used dialect to give her portrayals of the labouring-class Foresters authenticity, however her frequent reference to Saxon heritage is far from complimentary. For Trotter, Saxon is associated with a dullness of intelligence, and in *Heaven’s*

Gate, is also associated with a lack of moral fortitude, particularly in regard to drink: '"The old Saxon race always drank heavily," said William. "We are pretty well pure Saxons in the Forest of Dean"' (Trotter, 1886, 23). Trotter, in this respect, demonstrates an exception to McCauley's suggested trend in regard to respect for dialect, in which 'It is no longer a sign ascribing ignorance or inferiority to its speakers' (291). Trotter's writing, typified by her numerous contributions to magazines such as the *Girls Own Paper* (Gupta, 1996, 204), and *The Parents Review*' (Trotter, 1903), was aimed at educating young women[36] and therefore (despite her own origins growing up in the Forest) seems to have firmly considered dialect as a retrograde form of speech.

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The four Forest authors, Wickenden, Morse, Ducarel and Drew, of the first half of the nineteenth century, were the first then to begin to give literary and poetic expression to a truly tangible and distinctive Forest of Dean drawing in part upon their own personal experience of it. This was a departure from that earlier work by travel writers whose perception of the Forest was based on a brief experience of it as they passed through, or that of the county historians whose area of interest encapsulated a far broader canvas. This was also the beginnings of a departure too from those early, generic characterisations of it as a forest, though at times, as we have seen, some of those tropes continued to permeate depictions of the Forest of Dean. This first Forest of Dean literature reflects that development from the general to the specific, whilst continuing to incorporate many of those earlier, classical tropes: Forest dwellers shaped by the landscape; the Forest as outside the normal rules of civilised society. These four authors represent the first examples of what might be considered as Forest of Dean literature, describing a distinctive, recognisable place, occupied by a distinctive group of people, the Foresters, whilst at the very same time carrying forward the inheritance of those earlier tropes too.

[36] Trotter's work features strong female characters, several of whom demonstrate considerable agency. Her journalism and novels deserve further scholarly attention in this and other regards.

The work explored in this chapter can now make a valuable contribution to the local history and heritage of the Forest of Dean, and should be seen now as much part of the Forest's distinctive identity as its miners, colliers, iron and steel producers, forestry workers, and sheep badgers. David Adams', and Chris Noncollas', research and publications on Wickdenden and Morse have made a solid contribution in that regard. Beyond the value of the first authors of Forest of Dean literature to local history and heritage, their work can also now be seen as part of broader, national developments in literature during the period: an interest in individual voices, recognisable places, rural labouring class lives, and writing that was beginning to move away from the use of neo-classical allusions and poetic forms. Important as these writers are locally they also must be considered as part of these wider literary movements, and having make their own contribution to this wider literary history. Where several writers would feature the Forest of Dean in their work during the remaining half of the nineteenth century (Thomas Mayne Reid, Tom Bevan, S. M. Crawley-Boevey, Ada M. Trotter) it would be the following century that saw the most significant contributions to Forest of Dean literature. Though many of the authors of Forest of Dean literature of the first half of the nineteenth century, apart from Drew, would be largely forgotten, many of the same ideas about the Forest they portrayed would find their way into future Forest of Dean literature.

Chapter 3.

Forest of Dean Literature in the Twentieth Century

> Before the memory of the old ways have passed from memory we thought it important that the kind of life lived by our Forest ancestors should be preserved for posterity
> (Mounjoy and Boughton, 1971, v-vi)

> I should like you to see these papers as, having now seen Mrs. Foley, I must tell you that she seems to me to be a remarkable find. [She] comes from the Forest of Dean.
> (Benzie, 1954)

This chapter describes for the first time a history of Forest of Dean literature in the twentieth century[37]. It does this through focusing primarily on three authors: F. W. Harvey, Harry Beddington, and Winifred Foley. Other Forest authors are also be included to provide additional local literary and cultural context. The chapter takes as its starting point the latter part of the century, the 1970s and 1980s, and traces what will be shown to be the long and deep roots of that period's flowering of Forest of Dean literature. Research for this thesis, including access to archival material previously unexamined by scholars, challenges the current narrative regarding Winifred Foley's launch as a writer; forgotten works of Harry Beddington reveal the vibrancy of the Forest's local amateur drama scene and its importance in the development of his writing; and

[37] In wishing to demonstrate commonalities, connections and shared contexts this history is presented together in what is a chapter of some considerable length, numerous sub-headings included by way of additional signposting.

the importance of F. W. Harvey in the development of Forest of Dean literature in this century is examined.

This chapter will demonstrate that Forest of Dean literature in the twentieth century inherited many ideas and stories about the Forest that had appeared in earlier depictions of it, from early-modern times onwards. Whilst in this sense it was a continuum of long-standing, sometimes generic, ideas about the Forest and forests in general, the twentieth century also saw an ever more distinctive Forest of Dean described. As the century progressed Forest writers' work increasingly began to look backwards too, creating a vision of the Forest that was ever more detached from contemporary reality.

A Burgeoning Period for Forest of Dean Literature

The 1970s and 1980s marks a high point in publication and appreciation of Forest of Dean literature, indicated by several key landmark events. On the 3rd of April 1981, at The Angel Hotel in Coleford, a recording was made in front of a live audience that would later be released as a vinyl album: *Forest Talk: An Evening of Songs, Poetry and Humour From The Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, With Harry Beddington, Winifred Foley, Keith Morgan and Dick Brice*[38] (Beddington et al, 1981). The Forest Bookshop in Coleford that collaborated in the production of the *Forest Talk*, album had opened in 1973 (*The Forester*, 2014), and would later produce a second album, this time on cassette, called *A Quat An A Chat* (Foley et al, 1984), again featuring Morgan, Beddington and Foley, as was well as two other Forest of Dean writers Joyce Latham and Bill Tandy. Winifred Foley's *A Child in the Forest*, had been published by the BBC in 1974, her hand-written memoirs being serialised on Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, the year before. That book would later be reissued by The Forest Bookshop, its founder and proprietor Douglas McLean also publishing Foley's next title *No Pipe Dreams For Father* (1977). Over the next decade or so the bookshop would

[38] Bryce is a popular folk singer and songwriter, and though a figure worthy of study in regard to his contribution to Forest culture, will not be examined in this thesis.

publish two collections by poet Keith Morgan, (*The 'Azards o' Chimuck Szwippin'* in 1978, *Albert's Dree Wi'ker* in 1985); Bill Tandy's *A Doctor in the Forest* (1979, first published in 1978) and *The Ever Rolling Stream* (1985); and in 1983 a new collection of poems by the late poet F. W. Harvey. McLean was not the only publisher of Forest writers at the time: there were other small regional publishing houses in the area such as Gloucester-based Thornhill Press, and Stroud's Alan Sutton Publishing, and there was the local Dean Forest Newspapers group who published several local books themselves. Many Forest authors (Harry Beddington amongst them) simply published their own work, whilst historian and novelist Ralph Anstis set up his publishing enterprise, Albion House, from his home in Coalway to publish his own books.

This period then from the early 1970s to mid-1980s, marked a significant and productive period for Forest of Dean literature, facilitated in no small part by Doug McLean. As he explained to Ian Claridge for *The Bookshop*, programme on Forest of Dean Radio in 2003, by the time he opened The Forest Bookshop he had already had a successful career in book selling and publishing. As a teenager he had been a trainee book seller at W H Smith, and gaining his diploma at twenty one he spent the next ten years at Corgi Books before joining Granada Publishing. With a senior position in the company it was when he moved to the Forest of Dean that he decided to give up his job and to open his own bookshop. It was an immediate success and he soon began publishing local authors, his first big success being Winifred Foley's second book. Important as McLean's role at this time was in getting Forest authors' work to the reading (and listening) public, the origins of this most productive period of the 1970s and 1980s for Forest of Dean literature in reality, as this research reveals, pre-dated his arrival in the Forest by several decades.

One important factor in the development of new writers were the opportunities available to try out and develop their ideas in performance at the many social clubs, pubs, amateur drama groups, concert nights, and at the Forest's smoking parties (Latham, 1999). What might start as a simple turn, performing an amusing anecdote or self-penned poem for friends and family,

could later become something more practiced and worked upon. What might first appear in print in the local newspaper might later become a published book. By the time it made it into print, it would often be very well-tuned to what worked for a local audience.

There was also a loose, informal network between some of the writers allowing for a mentoring of developing talent by more established authors. F. W. Harvey, for example, was instrumental in the development of the young Leonard Clark's writing, and Beddngton and Clark corresponded (Deeks and Llewellyn, 2016). Keith Morgan corresponded with Clark, and developed his poetry and performance alongside, and with encouragement from, Harry Beddington (Morgan, 2017).

What developed in the twentieth century, particularly in its second half, was a literary culture that expressed many shared ideas about the Forest of Dean as a distinctive place and culture, rooted in its industrial past, its location, and how it differed from the rest of Gloucestershire. Some of the ideas in this work will be familiar, their literary origins being in those earliest literary portrayals of the Forest of Dean (as described in Chapter One). Much of the Forest writing of the twentieth century was also, though, in step with wider national, economic and cultural concerns of the time. As the century passed its mid-point, for example, employment had started to shift from the older heavy industries, replaced by lighter work in new factories. In this century, and from the 1950s onwards in particular, unease grew as national and global mass media and commercial culture seemed to threaten the older patterns of local communal life and culture. This was something that concerned Dennis Potter at the time and that he dealt with briefly in his first book *The Glittering Coffin* (1960), and in greater depth in *The Changing Forest* (1962).

As the pace of change appeared to increase, and the perception that the region's distinctiveness was disappearing all together, Forest authors wrote about what seemed to be being lost, their work often taking a distinctively nostalgic turn. In seeking to capture the very essence of the Forest of Dean in their writing, and some of them such as Foley and Clark reaching a national

readership, their work played a role in fixing an ever firmer notion of what the Forest of Dean was like. Whilst the material fact of economic transformation, and cultural change (running sheep, Freemining, brass bands, carnivals in relative, though far from terminal, decline) was having its impact on the Forest, far from a sense of its distinctive identity disappearing it was during this century that it become fixed ever more firmly and definitively in the public consciousness.

Although some of the Forest authors of the twentieth century appeared to be creating work aimed very much at a Forest of Dean readership, they too were not averse to appearing on or writing for the very media that some saw as partly responsible for eroding the Forest's very distinctiveness: radio, and later, television. As a result of their work being broadcast their versions of the Forest and Foresters reached and even wider audience. One of the Forest's most significant literary figures of the first part of the century, F. W. Harvey, did just that, his poems and thoughts on the Forest of Dean featuring in several BBC radio broadcasts in the first half of the century. As an established poet and author of some standing he would, through his broadcasts as well as his published poetry, do a great deal to popularise the idea of the Forest of Dean's distinctiveness. In so doing he also created an image of the Forest of Dean that would be taken up by many of the Forest authors that followed him, so it is with Harvey that this chapter begins.

F. W. Harvey

(1888 - 1957)

2010 saw the formation of the F. W. Harvey Society, prompted in part by the death of the late poet's son Patrick (F. W. Harvey Society, n.d.). A wealth of public engagement events and research followed, generating local interest in this important poet. The author Brian Waters, who had dedicated his book, *The Forest of Dean* (1951), to Harvey, had written in praise of him, as had Bill Tandy

in 1978, both men having got to know Harvey personally (he died in 1957). Tandy had lamented that Harvey's work was 'neglected nowadays' (Tandy, 1979, 217), and by the 1980's Harvey seems to have been largely forgotten. Douglas McLean published his collection of Harvey in 1983 including thirty previously unpublished Harvey poems, his hopes for the collection being that it would 'reintroduce his important and inspiring poems to readers of English Literature' (McLean in Harvey, 1983, 10). McLean would appear to have had some success in this endeavour as two biographies, one by Anthony Boden the other by Frances Townsend, were published in 1988. In 2009 Ross Davies published *F. W. Harvey: Poet of Remembrance*. Following the formation of the Society in 2010, Harvey's papers, discovered at his home in Yorkley, were moved to Gloucestershire Archives where they were catalogued as part of a PhD studentship with Exeter University. James Grant Repshire completed his thesis in 2016, *F.W. Harvey and the First World War: A biographical study of F.W. Harvey and his place in the First World War literary canon*. Whilst the place of Harvey's work amongst the war poets of the 1914-18 war and his status as 'The Gloucestershire Laureate' (Townsend, 1988), is now being recognised, his particular impact too on the development of Forest of Dean literature is also emerging. Harvey's place specifically amongst Forest of Dean authors has recently been recognised locally in a piece of high profile public art, his image joining that of other West Dean authors Joyce Latham and Dennis Potter (Griffiths, Deeks and Cousins, 2018).

Harvey the Forest Author

When Harvey moved to the Forest of Dean[39], first to Broadoak near Newnham-on-Severn in 1924 (Boden, 1998, 269), then to Pillowell, and in 1927 to settle in Yorkley (300), he was already a published poet of some standing. Brian Waters remembered that when he (Waters) was a boy 'Harvey's poems

[39] Harvey was born in Hartbury in 1888. When he was two years old the family moved to Minsterworth: farming country on the Severn-side between Gloucester and the Forest (Townsend, 1988, 9-10).

were to be found on the drawing-room tables of most homes in Gloucestershire' (Waters, 1951, 105). Harvey's work written in the trenches had first appeared in the Gloucestershire Regiment's newspaper the *Fifth Gloucester Gazette*[40] (Tandy, 1979, 81; Greives, 2008, 27), and in 1916 were collected and published as *A Gloucestershire Lad at Home and Abroad.* Several subsequent collections followed and a memoir *Comrades in Captivity,* in 1920. Harvey was a solicitor by profession and had moved to the Forest to work in the Newnham practice of his friend and fellow Gloucestershire poet John Haines[41]. Harvey later worked out of a Lydney office before setting up his practice from his own home in Yorkley. As Waters, Boden, and Tandy point out, Harvey's legal work for the poor, often for little or no fee, greatly endeared him to the Forest community. Harvey quickly became active in other ways amongst the Foresters too, in particular with the lively local music scene. Harvey initiated an annual gathering at the near-by Devil's Chapel (an atmospheric local landscape feature resulting from ancient iron mining). As well as local bands the event featured performances from Whitecroft Male Voice Choir (Tandy, 1979, 83), who Harvey would sometimes involve in his radio broadcasts. Testament to Harvey's appeal at the time, and the event itself, in 1935 it attracted 2,000 people, Harvey addressing the crowd as chairman of the event (*The Citizen*, 1935). On moving to the Forest Harvey had very quickly made it his home and he was very much taken to heart by the Foresters.

Harvey, though educated at public school, a former army officer, solicitor by profession and a published poet, was the antithesis of the aloof figure his social standing could have conferred on him amongst his working-class neighbours in the Forest of Dean. His generous approach to his legal work and the pleasure he found in spending time drinking in the local pubs (Boden, 1998, 292-4), meant that he became a well-known and well-loved local figure (Clark

[40] More accurately *5th Glo'ster Gazette* (Townsend, 1988, 28).

[41] Book collector, poet, and botanist, Haines corresponded with significant literary figures of the period, and encouraged other Gloucestershire writers. Friend and author John Moore described him as, 'clandestinely, one of the best literary critics in England, a poet and the confessor of poets' (Moore, 1933a, 7).

cited in Boden, 294), and crucially came to know and appreciate the character of his Forest neighbours. In travelling, often on foot, between clients, pubs and courts, he came to know the Forest's places and landscape too. Evidence of his familiarity with, understanding, and appreciation of the Forest of Dean can be found in several examples of his poetry, and in his radio talks.

Harvey's Forest Poems

Shortly after moving to the Forest, in 1926 Harvey's small collection *In Pillowell Woods and Other Poems,* was published and it includes three poems explicitly set in the Forest of Dean. In 'Lydney to Coleford (By Rail)', a route that travelled from Lydney near the Severn to Coleford in the heart of the Forest, Harvey reflects on the beauty of the surrounding woodlands. In it he argues that because all things are created by God the railway-line itself is literally 'divine' (Harvey, 2017, 6), and as such is worthy of reverence and wonder. Though the poem is by no means a religious tract, religious faith was important to Harvey and he had converted to Catholicism as a young man (Boden, 1998, 36; Townsend, 1988, 27). In this poem, though, he is stressing the railway's God-given origin as a means to take the reader beyond the utilitarian every-day, asking us to see the visual and spiritual beauty of the scene. Harvey is urging the reader to slow their pace in time with the slowing train. He laments our loss of appreciation and contact with nature because of our worldly, too-fast lives: 'Too oft does hurry rule us' (Harvey, 2017, 7). This journey and the beauty of the surrounding plants and insects is an opportunity to 'Discard Life's fret and fear', and to 'Forget – forget – forget' (7). For Harvey's generation this forgetting could be clearly understood as forgetting bad memories of the war, for those who, like Harvey had fought, but also for those who had lost loved ones. This poem is also simply a plea for the reader to, for a moment, ignore the everyday, the incessant urge to be busy, and instead take time aside from:

> […] such
> soft social soot as serves to smutch
> a life once tuned to Nature touch
> Now seldom felt – alas!
> (Harvey, 2017, 7)

This is Harvey recognising the therapeutic value of nature and a solitary communing with it; nature versus society, culture, people: the 'social soot'. It is perhaps a reflection of Harvey's own state of mind around this time. Sociable as Harvey's life was, drinking with his neighbours and friends in the local pubs, and participating in the local music scene, there was also a melancholy aspect to his nature. His pre-war friend, poet and composer Ivor Gurney, had described him even in 1917 (i.e. before his return from the war) as 'an untidy, careless dreamer who has known much sorrow' (Gurney 1917 cited in Townsend, 1988, 46). After the war Harvey suffered from bouts of depression and, as Boden (1998, 291) puts it 'wandered into the woodlands to find spiritual strength and release from stress'. Here then, in 'Lydney to Coleford (By Rail)', Harvey is recommending, as much from his own experience as from poetic convention, the value of solitary contemplation amongst nature. This was not the only poem by Harvey that put forward the curative qualities of nature.

In 'Absolution', nature is again a cure, but this time for 'memory of evil done', nature here being a source of 'pardon' (12). There is a link in this respect with another poem in the collection, this one closely tied to a specific Forest of Dean location. In 'Devil's Chapel', it is nature that is slowly erasing the man-made horrors connected to that particular place's history. Harvey explains that the origin of the landscape feature is in the ancient mining for iron ore. He says this was harsh work, carried out first by the local tribe for Phoenician traders then by British slaves under rule of Rome. From its 'dark and blood-soaked earth, Daggers and armour came to birth' (Harvey, 2017, 4). Harvey thus makes the link between this Forest location and the bloody history of Rome itself, the link being through the weapons made from the iron that was got there. Whether intentional or not, inspired by it or coincidence, there is strong reminder in

Harvey's lines of those of Abraham Cowley writing about the Forest of Dean in 1662:

> The Iron has its noblest Shades destroy'd;
> And so unhappy 'tis as it presents,
> Of its own Death the fatal instruments.
> (Cowley & Sprat, 1708, 450-51)

The Forest is a place of natural beauty but also of mineral wealth. For Cowley the iron extracted from within the woods is also the source of its own destruction, industry in opposition to nature. For Harvey the Forest's mineral wealth is also its curse, this as much for its impact on man as for its impact on nature. In Harvey's poem, as time has elapsed nature now has in large part reclaimed the Devil's Chapel from the influence of man. Even so, the place is still partly haunted and poisoned by the residue of its history carved into the landscape:

> […] So, like you, or like you *not*,
> Builded on this grim haunted spot
> A Chapel fine hath the Devil got!
> (Harvey, 2017, 5)

Nature is not always absolute in its ability to wipe away the scars of history, in the case of the Devil's Chapel site, a history carved into the very landscape[42].

Harvey, like many of his fellow countrymen, had turned to nature both during and after the war as a response to the shattered landscapes of the battlefields (exemplified in the war paintings of Paul Nash), and their experiences of warfare, and in Harvey's case the tedium too of life as a prisoner of war. Though Harvey spent much of the war as a prisoner he had seen action

[42] The site itself was clearly important to Harvey. As well as the subject of this poem it was location for the annual music event he had instigated, and also setting for a short comic opera *Devil's Chapel* (Harvey, 1943), script for the BBC written in Forest dialect. This important site for Harvey might be seen as encapsulating the essence of the Forest's landscape: past & present, industry & nature, held in tension.

at the front and had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his successful attack on an enemy listening post. Along with his fellow officer Harvey had not only shot two of the enemy, but also whilst pursuing another '"felling one of the retreating Germans with a bludgeon"' (*The London Gazette*, cited in Clark, 1965, 109). In his poem 'Absolution', Harvey was perhaps then seeking 'pardon', from nature in regard to this visceral killing of his fellow man: Immersion in nature is both a means of forgetting, and at the same time a source of forgiveness.

As much as Harvey wrote about the value of being amongst nature his poetry is also a poetry of specific landscapes and places. Harvey is a poet tied inescapably to the countryside of Gloucestershire: '"intoxicated with the very fact of being Gloucester bred"' (Hurd, 1978; Kavannagh, 1982; Hooker, 1982; cited in Grieves, 2008). Unlike, for example, the group of poets who for a short time were clustered around the Gloucestershire village of Dymock in the years leading up to the war, Harvey was personally deeply invested in his home county, and as a life-long resident was deeply fascinated by his home's distinctive people and places. As Keith Grieves (2008), points out, this concern for specific places was common to much of the poetry of the post First World War period.

Grieves argues that the focus on place to be found in so much of the work by soldier poets of the period, such as Harvey, was as much in providing a rationale for their fighting as it was a balm for the soul in response to the horrors that they witnessed. The places they described were, moreover, less symbols of England in general, as they were instead evidence that 'the great sacrifice was chiefly made for *localities*' [my emphasis] (Grieves, 2008, 25). These were specific places, not just, for example, the English countryside in general. The role of place and attachment to place was then far more significant for these writers than any abstracted notion of England. This was just so for Harvey who wrote specifically of Gloucestershire, and later of the Forest of Dean. He tapped into the county's, and latterly (specifically in regard to this thesis) the Forest of Dean's, local stories, traditions, characters and voices too, as well as his own

individual responses to specific local places and landscapes. Much of Harvey's poetry is then a poetry of place, and particularly after he had moved to the Forest it is poetry tied specifically to the Forest as a place. Deliberate, no doubt then, that now settled amongst the Forest of Dean community the first poem in Harvey's 1926 collection *In Pillowell Woods and Other Poems*, was a poem irrefutably tied to the Forest: a poem that spoke clearly of the place. The poem was 'Warning', the majority of which was inspired by events at the end of the nineteenth century, and their twentieth-century reverberations. Harvey would not be the only twentieth century author to pick up on this story, so it is his and these others treatment of this story we turn to now.

'Them there bears'[43]

Warning

'Warning' (2017, first published in 1926), recounts the tale of an inquisitive but ill-prepared visitor to the Forest who comes to an unfortunate end because he asked a notoriously provocative question in one particular Forest village. Harvey's visitor is a 'gentle soul, of mild enquiring mind' (2017, 1), who knows very little about where he is, much to the amusement of the local inhabitants. They feed his curiosity with humorous misinformation based on overly literal interpretations of place names such as 'who had put the lid, on Lydney' (1). All is relatively well until he arrives in the village of Ruardean.

Ruardean in reality was the location of a notorious incident that occurred in 1889 in which four Frenchmen who were touring the region with two dancing bears were attacked and their bears killed. As Roger Deeks has revealed

[43] This was the headline to a newspaper piece (*Dean Forest Mercury,* 1968a) on the response of its readers to news of Dennis Potter's next play, to be filmed locally, *A Beast with Two Backs* (1968).

(Griffiths and Deeks, 2019), due to its particular timing[44], the incident received widespread local, national and then international press coverage. Ever since, mention of those events has been has been used by people from outside the area wishing to ridicule Foresters. In the original incident the mob arose in the near-by town of Cinderford, the French men and the bears being pursued to Ruardean where they met their fate, the bears being killed. Ever since that time[45] the question 'who killed the bears?', has been considered a provocation, initially anywhere in the Forest, but later more strongly associated with Ruardean. In Harvey's poem the provocation proves fatal, a group of local men beating up the visitor, 'Our gentle friend was dead' (Harvey, 2017, 2). This cautionary tale is the warning of the title. Harvey adds two more examples of particular local stories, the pig on the wall at Yorkley, and the man without a shirt at Dymock, and warns the potential visitor to not ask about these either: 'It's better to be ignorant, Than dead beneath the sod' (2).

The reader Harvey is addressing in 'Warning', is ostensibly the next potential visitor to the Forest: the warning is for them. It is a cautionary tale of a too curious tourist seeking to explore the (presumed quaint) folklore of the region. Harvey also has a local readership in mind as he revels in depicting the Forest as a dangerous place, peopled by fierce inhabitants, whilst at the same time introducing a knowing humour at the expense of the outsider. Harvey demonstrates a profound understanding of a Forest humour that ruthlessly pricks any sense of superiority possessed by those assuming the role of patronising anthropologist (professional or otherwise), seeking to study what they might see as a quaint country people. 'Warning', is a fierce evocation of place, reinforced in Harvey's performance of the poem (recorded for a BBC

[44] Dr Roger Deeks persuasively argued, in a public lecture in Ruardean, the reasons for such widespread press coverage was the fear that the attack on the four Frenchmen would endanger Britain's strategy to support French dissident General Boulanger; and also urban establishment disquiet at the 1884 franchise extension to include more rural voters. His lecture was part of the Reading the Forest event, *Bear Stories: 130yrs of poems, books, films & tales since 'the killing of the bears'*, held in Ruardean on 27th April 2019.

[45] As Deeks revealed in his talk (above), the first reported case - in *The Citizen*, 1890 - of the phrase 'who killed the bears?', being used knowingly as a taunt to provoke trouble was in Cinderford only a year after the original events took place.

broadcast, now available online at The Poetry Archive) using a strong local pronunciation, dead becoming 'jud', for example. This is not place evoked through story marked in the physical landscape as in 'Devil's Chapel', instead this is place evoked through people and local legend. Gruesome as it may seem Harvey's description of a violent response to inquisitive visitors – his warning – is a demonstration of his identification with his Forest friends too often looked down upon by their urban and regional neighbours (see Moore below). Yes, Harvey is reinforcing the idea of a rough, rural people, a reminder and embracing re-appropriation of Dr Parsons' assessment of them as '"A sort of robustic wild people, that must be civilised by good discipline and government"' (cited in Nicholls, 1858, 56), but he is also identifying with them and speaking for them: he is both spokesman for them and one of them. It is part tongue in cheek, playing with the Forester's reputation, but also maybe a warning with just a suggestion of real threat to any of the Forest's urban neighbours who may choose to look down upon the Foresters. It is a celebration of a distinctive and robust sense of local identity, one not to be trifled with or patronised. Encapsulated in this important Forest of Dean poem is a sensibility that would be expressed, at times through the very same local stories Harvey refers to, by Forest writers that followed him.[46] It was though the story of the bears that has reappeared most often in Forest of Dean literature, and the first was in the work of John Moore.

John Moore's Use of the Bear Story

John Moore (1907 – 1967) had got to know and corresponded with Harvey's friend John 'Jack' Haines, and would correspond with him throughout his career. In 1951 he wrote to Haines asking for specific proof of the bear story

[46] One of the legends mentioned, the pig on the wall, would be taken up by poet Keith Morgan. His poem 'Pig On The Wall', tells the story of how a pig, desperate to see the band it can hear coming, is lifted to sit on the wall so it can see the band march by. Like Harvey, this is Morgan taking a local story and using it to evoke a strong sense of the Forest's identity: two men at first appearing foolish for assuming a pig wanted to see the band, but by the end being proven quite right as ' 'E sat there content wi' 'is yud in the aire, An' ewatched thic old brass band go past' (Morgan, 1978, 26).

(Moore, 1951). In the letter to Haines, Moore says that he had received a number of letters in response to a piece he had written on the bears story for the *Birmingham Mail*, one of which challenged Moore to prove it had ever happened at all. Haines replies suggesting that Moore should refer to Brian Waters' book *The Forest of Dean* (1951), and mentions the specific pages that deal with the bears. Haines also mentions Harvey as a good source. Moore would go on to employ the Foresters' robust response to the taunt 'who killed the bears?', as a device in his 1954 novel *White Sparrow.* He first wrote about it though in 1933 in the opening section of his book *The Welsh Marches*[47].

The first scene opens with him calling at a pub on the edge of the Forest of Dean where he is warned against visiting the Forest and, in particular, not to mention the bears in Ruardean. Moore recounts that he had, prior to setting off on his journey, been to see Haines about the Forest. Haines, having a role with Her Majesty's Verderers (Moore, 1933a, 7; Hart, 1971a, 142), knew the Forest well and had warned Moore in regard to Ruardean, 'not to look for trouble' (Moore, 1933a, 8). Moore, after drinking in Cinderford finds himself with his local fellow drinkers walking with them towards their homes in Ruardean. Several pints of beer prompting a loss of inhibition Moore asks the question. Much like Harvey's 'gentle soul, Of mild enquiring mind' (2017, 1), Moore admits that he was:

[47] Moore, then in his twenties, had set out to walk along the length of border between England and Wales, inspired perhaps by W. H. Davies' (another acquaintance of Haines) book *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* (1908), or Stephen Graham's more idealised vision of gentile tramping (Wright, 2009, 21-22), *The Gentle Art of Tramping* published in 1927. Moore dedicated his book to Jack and Dorothy Haines (Moore, 1933a, viii).

> prompted less by mischief than by what seemed, at the time, to be a spirit of scientific inquiry. I would find out for myself whether the reactions of Ruardean to the word 'bear' were as strangely violent as I had been led to suppose. I felt the aloof and academic interest of a professor who mixes two acids in a retort and wonders whether the compound will explode.
>
> It did explode.
>
> (Moore, 1933a, 22)

Moore chooses to run rather than, outnumbered, face a fight. He uses the incident to introduce his reader to the Forest and it serves to place him as the intrepid traveller. It emphasises the otherness of the Forest of Dean and its strange, brutal backwardness. Unlike Harvey who, by the time he was writing 'Warning', was very much part of the Forest community, Moore is writing from his perspective as a visitor. Before entering the Forest he is advised by the land-lady that '"the Foresters are so intermarried. Lot of lunacy there is in the Forest"' (7), again emphasising an image of the otherness, low morality and supposed stupidity of the Forest population. Moore's own descriptions of the Forest's woods draw on ideas familiar from the early topographers, for Moore it being 'a place of shadows' (9). Moore also detours into some of the settlements describing them as 'drab, dreadful' (12), 'miserably dingy' (33) and 'simply a disgrace' (34), after which it is with some relief that he leaves the Forest of Dean for the picturesque Wye Valley: 'I was now at the edge of the Forest, and I had a sense of having come out of darkness into light' (36). This is just as those early-modern writers viewed the dark, strange and threatening interior of the Forest's woods from a vantage point on the wide open and sunlit River Severn, eager to pass by. Moore, whilst deploying the same story and trope of the fierce Foresters as Harvey did, as illustrated by the bears story, is, unlike Harvey, one step removed: the travel writer visiting, not a part of the community. This is unlike Harvey's more confident, humorous and comradely *Warning,* (or Beddington's similarly toned *Who Killed the Bear*s, below), written from the position of someone in tune with the community they lived amongst, and whose cultural world they were integrated within and understood. Whilst Moore twice

visited the Forest in print, and commented in a letter to Haines after passing through in 1933 that 'I like the Foresters' (Moore, 1933b), his writing career would focus on the conventional farming countryside he depicted in his Brensham trilogy, writing about a community and landscape he did know intimately.

Harry Beddington: 'However thou bist exin' vor't'

Harry Beddington's treatment of the bears story in his comic dialect verse 'Who Killed the Bears' (Beddington, 1961), is in much the same vein as Harvey's. Beddington's is also a short narrative, but this time the visitor to Ruardean is Harry himself. Harry is narrator and hero of the tale, much in the same mode as William Wickenden in his tales of adventure a century earlier. In his poem Harry is purposely looking to test the veracity of the legend, that the village's touchiness at the mention of bears could provoke a fight: it does. Following very positive confirmation of that in the form of a thorough beating, Harry, like Harvey, issues his own warning:

> If thou bist ever up thic road
> An' veel thouse like zum fun
> Thou exe um who 'twas killed the bears
> But, Mister – TAKE A GUN ! !
> (Beddington, 1961, 8)

Like Harvey's, Beddington's poem is revelling in the image of the tough Forester, irritated with the false accusations heaped upon them, and prepared to tackle them head on. Beddington expanded on this theme in another of his poems 'A Race Apart', where this confident sense of self is expressed, when considered necessary, through physical means. For Beddington this no more than simply a response in-kind according to how Foresters are treated:

> Thay'll slap tha on the shoulder
> Ar clip tha on the jaw
> However thou bist exin' vor't
> T'wunt worry then at all

(Beddington, 1977, 157)

As in Harvey's 'Warning', Beddington here expresses a refusal to meekly accept the jibes aimed at Forest residents by their urban neighbours.

Leonard Clark's Bear Facts

Only a few years after Beddington's poem, Harvey's one-time protégé Leonard Clark (1901 - 1985) sought to set the historical record straight regarding true responsibility for the attack on the Frenchmen. In his 1964 booklet *Who Killed the Bears,* Clark's research of the historical records finds him laying the blame firmly with the people of Cinderford. It was Cinderford people who had pursued the bears and two of the Frenchmen from there to Ruardean, the people of that village in reality giving the Frenchmen refuge (Clark, 1981a, 7). Clark's factual account of the original nineteenth century events is a long way from the dark humour of Harvey, or the knockabout comedy of Beddington. For Clark 'It is a horrible story', such that, as someone who grew up in the Forest he is 'almost ashamed to tell it' (Clark, 1981a, 9). A similarly serious take on the story, focusing on the original events, was taken by Dennis Potter.

A Beast with Two Backs

In the hands of Dennis Potter the bears story inspired his darkly-themed television play *A Beast with Two Backs* (1968), a claustrophobic morality tale of ignorance, xenophobia, hypocrisy and brutality. Set in the Forest during the 1890s Potter's drama does not follow the original events in every detail, but he does cut to the violent heart of the original attack and what he sees as the culture that facilitated it. In Potter's play there is a single bear, 'Gina', with her handler, 'Joe', an Italian. Potter recalls hearing the story of the killing of the bears (as Clark did) when he was growing up[48] in the Forest.

[48] Though not necessarily aware whilst writing it, he acknowledged some years later that his version of the story was also a metaphor for some of his own feelings at the time, his sense that growing up he had been the odd child, not fitting in with his classmates: that child was represented by the bear (Fuller, 1993, 36-37).

There was much criticism of the play locally (and some praise[49]), some of it even before being broadcast, as in an interview with the local newspaper (*Dean Forest Mercury,* 1968b), Potter had talked about the play, explaining that it was to be filmed on location in the Forest. Potter was himself a contentious figure locally after his *Between Two Rivers* (1960), television documentary, but much of the unease was because of the bears story itself. Emily Moore (who had performed in several of Harry Beddington's plays, below) wrote a letter to the newspaper saying that she found 'Mr Potter's inclusion of part of "the Bear story", deplorable and quite unworthy of a local playwright' (Moore, 1968), clearly suggestive that in her mind the story was taboo. Potter's response to Moore's letter, and, as he reveals her additional personal letter to him, is in parts hilariously funny, but he also goes on to explain why he chose to write a play based loosely on the true story. For him it is 'a story about suspicion, fear, poisonous rumour, deep hostility to the stranger' (Potter, 1968). Following the broadcast there was even more criticism, on various grounds from the quality of acting, its perceived attack on religion, to its dark portrayal of the Forest. There was though praise too, in this letter from Y. R. Yarworth for what it said about the less positive aspects of Forest community life:

> Seldom have I observed such an accurate portrayal of people and personality that related to the residents of the Forest of Dean. Mr Potter is to be congratulated on his unerring attention to detail: it was all there – the bigotry, the malicious gossip, the evil informer, the scandalous indiscretion, the total intolerance; it could only be based on absolute fact.
> (Yarworth, 1968)

In the same newspaper article local author Harry Beddington recounted a conversation he had with a group in Cinderford the morning after the play was broadcast. Despite his defence of the play their complaint was about the failure

[49] One such letter looking forward to the play was from a Ken W. Sollars (1968), of Lydbrook, who two decades later had his poem *1889 – Who Killed the Bears?,* printed for the 1989 anniversary marked in Ruardean. There were commemorative mugs produced too!

of the play to show the Forest's natural beauty (something both Beddington in the article, and Potter himself agreed with[50]), but also its negative portrayal of their Forest ancestors. The strength of feeling the bears story had stirred up amongst this group was such that they had this 'pithy parting shot,' for Harry as he walked away:

> "If 'im went down there this marnin' thay'd put a muzzle
> on un an' 'ang un on Pingry's Tump[51]."
> (Beddington, 1968)

The broadcast of the television play, filmed on location in the Forest of Dean, and featuring many local extras, was clearly a significant event in itself. This was remarked on in the same newspaper piece by then aspiring poet Joyce Latham, (two decades before any publication of her poetry collections or memoirs), in the lines 'Oh! What a wondrous sight to see, The "Forest" on our own T.V.!' (Latham, 1968). That aside, the strong reaction against the play was in large part due to its focusing on the original events, little amongst that real history to be celebrated. In contrast the folkloric depiction of Foresters grimly defending their honour against gibes from outsiders, as depicted in Harvey's and Beddington's poems, and even, perhaps, in John Moore's 1933 account, is seen as a positive portrayal of local distinctiveness , pride, and physical valour. If the original story is seen as a dark stain on the Forest's reputation, evidence of rural ignorance, the subsequent story is seen as suitable for comic verse.

Harvey's Understanding of the Forest

Harvey's take on the bear story can be seen as a demonstration of his deep understanding of local values and attitudes. Harvey was a writer of wider Gloucestershire, but it was his deep appreciation and understanding of the

[50] Potter said, 'Unfortunately I don't think it actually did show the true nature of the forest, rising in layers between two rivers – green, black, green, black, huddled, interned. Some of it didn't get across' (Fuller, 1993, 36)

[51] The site of a former gallows, and location of the hanging in the eighteenth century of murderer Eli Hatton who is alleged to have placed a curse on the town of Mitcheldean (Nicholls, 1858, 85), also marked by Keith Morgan's poem 'Eli Hatton's Curse' (Morgan, 1985).

Forest that would give his poems and other writing about the Forest of Dean a profound sense of it as distinctive place: a place to be valued, appreciated and praised, and this was something that would endear him to his Forest neighbours. As much as locally Harvey was valued for his legal work, his contribution to local cultural life, and his conviviality, he was too for his poetry. Brian Waters recalls a local telling him that a poem of Harvey's was even '"writ up in big letters on the wall of the Jovial Colliers [pub] at Lydbrook"' (Waters, 1951, 107). Local readers might be picking up his poetry to read, but it was arguably Harvey's work with BBC Radio that would give him the opportunity to expand on his portrayal of the Forest of Dean, and enable his writing on the Forest to reach an even wider audience.

Harvey's Forest of Dean on the Radio

The number of radio licences[52] in Britain grew from 500,000 in 1923 to over 9,000,000 in 1939 (Briggs, 1981, 54-55), and in the Forest of Dean a young Winifred Foley (nee Mason) was listening in[53]:

> I can remember when the radio started, and we had earphones by the fireplace, and the neighbours used to come in, and there used to be some comics on called Blossom…Henry and Blossom, and they'd go "Two L O calling, Two L O calling"
> (Foley, 2002)

Whilst 2LO was the station sign for the BBC's early London broadcast station, Britain's public service broadcaster also quickly established regional transmitter stations and this allowed for a mix of national and regional programming to be broadcast. The BBC was quickly seen as having a role in

[52] Required for legal use of a radio receiver.
[53] Her father, a coal miner and outspoken union activist, made radio sets to sell to local people as a means to get out of debt, his union activity causing him to be periodically black-listed from working in local collieries. With some left-over parts he made one for his family too.

unifying the newly formed United Kingdom[54] 'making the nation as one man', as its Director General John Reith put it (1924 cited in Higgins, 2015, 9). Now, through broadcasting, there was no limit to the number of people able (in theory) to access the country's cultural riches and visions of a culturally unified country via the airwaves.

The first year of the BBC as a corporation was immediately following the General Strike, and an establishment fearful of the potential for a proletariat revolution in Britain saw the potential in radio to promote national unity and shared values around an 'idealised dream of England' (Street, 2006, 67). That vision of England, prevalent in the wider culture during the inter-war years and on into the second world war (Brace, 2003), was characterised by a strong nostalgia for the rurality of a pre-war countryside-England[55] (Street, 2006, 67). The soldier poets, including Harvey, had written of an England that was made up of localities, and so it would be to some extent with the BBC as it rapidly developed. Regional transmission and production allowed for the picture of a Britain of different places and regions to emerge. Despite the austere image of the BBC's first director general John Reith, the BBC was, according to Higgins (2015, 37) 'a culturally polyglot organisation', varied in its tastes and broadcast output, and with a genuine sense of a mission to build a better educated and better informed nation in the aftermath of the First World War. This extended to its efforts to reflect the regional variations of the nation too. The BBC's Cardiff studios had opened in 1923, becoming the home of the BBC West region (Medhurst, 2019) by the time of F. W. Harvey's first radio broadcasts. The BBC's studios in Bristol opened in 1934, becoming the new home of regional

[54] Though by 1927 the BBC was incorporated under Royal Charter with a public service remit it had started as a commercial company in 1922 (BBC, History of the BBC 1920s). As Charlotte Higgins (Higgins, 2015, 8), points out, 1922 was also the year the modern nation of the United Kingdom was born, the island of Ireland having been split in two.

[55] At the same time there was a developing Modernist movement in art, literature and architecture. As Street points out, whilst the pastoral vision of England was typified in music by Vaughn Williams, there was also a developing taste for trans-Atlantic dance music broadcast by the BBC's commercial rivals (Street, 2008, 68). Furthermore Peter Mandler challenges the idea that there was such a widespread, popular and unproblematic yearning for a past rurality during this period, instead arguing that England was, in reality, one of the least concerned with preserving its countryside of any European country. (Mandler, 1997).

broadcasting in the West in 1937 (Deeks, 2013, 46). The West region would be where the majority of Harvey's broadcasts on the Forest would be heard.

An important radio format for the BBC during this period was the radio talk, and under the leadership of Hilda Matheson, the BBC's Talks Department had rapidly developed radio presentation style from that of the public hall lecture to a more intimate mode of address suitable for its largely domestic reception via radio in the home (Scannel, 1991, 3; Hunter, 1994). Harvey proved to be a good fit for this developing format, was relatively well-placed geographically for both Cardiff and then Bristol, and so was often to be heard on the radio between his debut in the late 1920s right up until shortly before his death in 1957.

In his paper 'F. W. Harvey at the British Broadcasting Corporation' (Deeks, 2013, p46-55), Roger Deeks[56] uncovers the scale and breadth of Harvey's broadcasting as revealed by Harvey's papers. Deeks argues that Harvey was a natural fit for radio, his work already known to the audience having been regularly included in the BBC's poetry output (read by professional announcers), and Harvey himself being a confident public speaker.

Harvey was also well-educated, in a professional career, and having served during the war he had much in common with many of those who were running and working in the early BBC . As radio historian David Hendy notes, the BBC at the time 'had very quickly become stuffed full of ex-military types' (Hendy, 2014, 96). Hendy persuasively argues that because of this the early BBC was an institution that was 'shaped by "systems of feeling" as much as by rational planning and coherent policy', and 'moods and emotions such as a post-war veneration of home and a desire for personal and social stability' (Hendy, 2014, p82). Not only this, but also those involved who had been exposed to the acoustic bombardments of war at the front had developed what Hendy describes as a new sensitivity to, and appreciation of, sound, or as he terms this had developed a '"sonic-mindedness"' (Hendy, 2014). Perhaps this gave some of Harvey's ex-military contemporaries, now radio producers, particularly well-

[56] Founder of the F. W. Harvey Society.

tuned ears that appreciated his rich Gloucestershire accent and occasional use of Forest dialect. This then was the context in which Harvey entered into broadcasting, an environment and medium that he would prove to be particularly well suited to, and particularly skilled at writing for.

Harvey's early talks were written on a range of topics[57] but the Forest of Dean became his most persistent theme. His six part series *My Friends the Foresters* was broadcast in late 1935 (Deeks, 2013, 54), and early 1936[58]. The BBC's use of Harvey on air for both the general and more specifically locally themed broadcasts, indicated his value of being able to write work suited to the two different forms of regional talks as described by Janet Dunbar: there was either the specialist that happens to be located in a region (and thus locally available), or the other 'more parochial, in the sense that his talk is of definite regional interest' (Dunbar, 1954, 104). Harvey was actually able to do both: talk as an expert regionally on many diverse topics, and speak as an expert on the region. Though Harvey's writing would occasionally be heard beyond the region the majority of his broadcasting would be for the regional airwaves of the BBC in the West. Harvey was then, in effect, talking largely to a home audience when for example, during part two of *My Friends the Foresters,* he performed 'Warning'.

Deeks' paper details the scale of work Harvey did with the BBC[59] and stresses Harvey's importance in raising awareness of the Forest of Dean to radio listeners, concluding his paper with this assessment:

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[57] From his very first *Beasts, Reptiles, Poets,* in 1928, to *Seven Books for Children,* in 1932, the subjects and form of his broadcasts continued with some variation, in June 1944 for example he broadcast *Here Lies - A talk on Epitaphs* (Deeks, 2013, 54).

[58] At the time of Deeks' publication the broadcast dates for parts 4 to 6 of *My Friends the Foresters* was not known. Access to *The Radio Times* listings of the period now available online via the BBC's Genome Project reveals they were broadcast on 3rd and 17th January, and 1st February 1936, respectively.

[59] Through Harvey, Whitecroft Male Voice Choir were recorded for broadcast seven times, several BBC producers visited him at his home in Yorkley, as technology improved, recording him and some of his Forest friends on location there. Deeks also argues that Harvey's four part drama series *Gunter's Farm,* (each episode set and broadcast during one of the four seasons) aired during 1935-6, made an important contribution to the development of radio drama (Deeks, 2013).

> Harvey's broadcasting awakened many parts of Britain to the treasures of the Forest of Dean […] In the inter war period he was regarded as the 'voice' of the Forest of Dean. He endeared audiences who heard his programmes and the producers he worked with to his outlook on the world and the Forest of Dean.
> (Deeks, 2013, 52)

Based on records currently available, it appears that the majority of Harvey's work was broadcast only within the BBC's West region, though that said Deeks' point about Harvey's impact and role as '"voice" of the Forest of Dean', remains valid. Exploring now, in some detail, one of Harvey's Forest scripts will reveal the characteristics of the Forest of Dean that Harvey portrayed.

Reading Harvey's scripts for *My Friends the Foresters* (Harvey, 1935), held in Gloucestershire Archives, a strong sense of a distinctive place is made immediately apparent, in Part One, not least through Harvey's mimicry of Forest dialect.

> If upon your travels in search of world romance you should see an old man unharness a donkey, turn him on common land, and address him thus: "Well old butty, there's yunt much fer that a yut (eat) but the scenery be wonderful?" – then you are in the Forest of Dean.
> (Harvey, 1935, Part One)

Immediately we have the Forest, rich in dialect, rich in character, rich in scenery, land held in common, yet not much to 'yut' (eat), in other words not a place of rich pasture (nor, for that matter, economic wealth). Whilst access to Forest waste (common land) to graze animals such as sheep and pigs allowed a small element of self-sufficiency (and for those with more animals some supplementary income), the Forest during this period was relatively economically depressed. Ralph Anstis writes that in the years following the 1926 miners' strike the Forest of Dean suffered 'much unemployment and short time' (1999, 89), with numbers employed in mining having fallen, never to fully recover (though temporarily boosted again during World War Two).

Harvey repeatedly deploys dialect throughout the series, and several hand-written corrections show how important Harvey felt it was to use this correctly, but also for best effect, for example 'theres not yunt much' (Part One), and, 'A Forest of Dean man "Vorrester"' (part 2). In Part Six he speaks in praise of the Forester's use of dialect, commenting that, though their vocabulary may be made up of a limited number of words they more than compensate through their creative use of language. Harvey also adds that he sees no sign yet of dialect being eroded through education.

Harvey communicates in two distinct modes of address: standard English for the main body of the script, and Forest dialect in performing the speech of his Forest neighbours. For all of his assimilation into the local community and positive presentation of it, his required use of standard English for the aspects of his radio programme in which he is in effect a BBC presenter, sets up a hierarchical relationship between himself and his Forest friends. Harvey's authority as presenter, and author of some standing, is expressed through his use of standard English, a requirement for any BBC talks presenter at the time. As Lynda Mugglestone (2008), has demonstrated, early in the BBC's development it settled on a very particular form of southern standard English for its broadcasting, with dialect being restricted to only entertainment and comedy (see later in this chapter). Harvey, as a presenter delivering a (serious) talk wholly in Forest dialect would have broken acceptable broadcasting conventions of the time. His attention to detail in the scripting of the dialect though and his skill in its performance, does convey a level of authenticity, if ultimately it *may* have been perceived by the audience as used for comic effect. There are then, two levels of authority at work in his programmes: authoritative presenter in standard English, and authentic performer of dialect. Ultimately, however, the opposition remains: in switching from educated standard English presenter, to the mimicking (albeit convincingly) of Foresters in dialect, he is in effect highlighting their strangeness, difference and distance even from him. Even so, Harvey's attention to detail in presentation of Forest dialect and his

inclusion of it in many of his accounts of the Forest of Dean, contributed to it as being understood as a key component of the Forest's distinctiveness.

In this series Harvey's writing demonstrates a profound and sophisticated understanding of the radio medium, creating rich pictures with words, dialect playing its part too in creating a vivid and distinctive sound world; the scripts a demonstration of Hendy's 'sonic-mindedness'. Harvey's appreciation and communication of the rich linguistic texture of the Forest is matched by his skilled, vivid depiction of the landscape as he choreographs the listeners' imagined movement into the Forest. Locating the Forest first via a bird's eye view on an imaginary map, he suggests the listener might take an aeroplane from the airport at Filton. And why not? The listener, incorporeal, is free to travel Ariel-like on Harvey's words conveyed through their mind's eye over the Severn estuary and into the Forest. On arrival Harvey indicates his agenda for the programme, revealing that this is a place of people, both of whom, in this instance, he knows personally:

> You might land at Yorkley in Ernie Liddington's meadow, just missing the crossbar of a rugby goal post. Below you about 800 feet the Severn winds in great lops of golden sand and silver water. The Severn is one boundary of "the Forest". The Wye is another.
> (Harvey, 1935, part 1)

Here we have the land between two rivers, the upland island Forest image of a bounded land. Harvey next, in direct address, invites us, the listener, to lean in and eavesdrop on a conversation, camera-like taking us from a panoramic view to a close-up one. Havery's script is incredibly visual, facilitating the creation of pictures in the listener's mind's eye. The imagined conversation we listen in on, voiced by Harvey, is in heavy Forest dialect, two companions discussing various topics on the theme of pay packets:

> "Didst thou'ear wot 'Jummer' did zay to the Means Test mon? after a lot o' questions – 'How much money have yer got in the bank? a axed.
> "Only 'bout a thousand!" said Jummer.

"Don't' be funny, now!" shouts the Means Test mon.

"Well, who started it?" axes Jummer.
"I aim that shun un up."
(Harvey, 1935, part 1)

Dialect here creates a strong sound-image of distinctive Forest speech, whilst at the same time providing an opportunity to introduce the figure of the quick-thinking, witty Forester. Anecdotes such as this are scattered throughout the series, a form and style that Harvey may well have picked up in his conversations with his neighbours, in the pub, or otherwise, and one that would be replicated in the work of future Forest authors[60].

In *My Friends the Foresters,* Harvey, (as Beddington in particular would later seek to do in his work too), both expresses and explains the distinctiveness of the Forest. He is describing how the Forest *is* whilst looking to explain *why* it is like that. His writing for this radio series is an act of creative construction (and performance) of a narrative for the Forest of Dean that repeats and perpetuates familiar themes; but is also a mixing of this with his own close, personal observations as a member of that community. Harvey's explanation of how the Foresters came to be how they are is, in part, a familiar one. Just as in the earliest literary references to the region the people are shaped by their landscape, Camden writing that the woods had 'rendred the Inhabitants barbarous'(Gibson, 1722, 269), so with Harvey he argues in *My Friends the Foresters,* that it is the Forest's geography, and its history, that are the causes of its distinctive identity.

[60] In Harry Beddington's work they are often stories about real people that some of his readers might have known, whilst at other times assigned to the Forest's folk-figure Jolter. Harry, born in Cinderford and living there his whole life, had, like Harvey, a well-tuned ear for, and appreciation of, the Forest dialect and wit, picked up amongst his friends and family and as he (Harry) travelled the Forest in his work in regional education administration. Similarly, for Winifred Foley, particularly in her books that followed after *A Child in the Forest,* her anecdotes, some of them longer and more descriptive, often feature her Jolter equivalent, Jarge. Her work too would feature dialect dialogue too. The anecdote in Keith Morgan's work takes the form of dialect poems also featuring Jarge, but also such figures as Jummy, 'Arry, and Billy, often, according to Keith, based on real events that featured them. The anecdotal form works especially well in performance, drawing perhaps on its conversational performative origins, a type of stand-up comedy rooted in local stories and characters (as can be heard to excellent effect on the *Forest Talk* album).

In looking to its geography and history Harvey describes the Foresters by nature as 'communistic' (Harvey, 1936, part 2), ascribing this to their geographical isolation. This isolation engenders a level of interdependence (between each other) and independence (from outside), and self-sufficiency. Harvey writes that in sport they prefer football (presumably the rugby form) to cricket, the former being more of a team sport; when not working or playing they like to congregate in either the pub or the chapel; isolated they are forced to be resourceful, self-sufficient, and to help each other out. 'Geography controls history', writes Harvey 'History laws. Laws economics. Economics, men' (part 2). In part three he delves into the Forest's history, introducing and explaining the rights to common, the Verderers, and the Freeminers, going into great detail with each. These aspects of the Forest's history, its geographical and cultural distinctiveness, would be key elements in much of the Forest of Dean literature that followed Harvey in the twentieth century. Significant as Harvey's broadcasts may have been in disseminating these ideas, Harvey was of course not the first to draw on these ideas as a means to describe and explain its distinctiveness[61]. Harvey's version of the Forest was not uniquely original by any means, but he was the first Forest author able to broadcast his writing on it, in detail and at length, on the new mass medium of radio. It is clear that Harvey's writing for radio demonstrates his profound understanding of the medium, a fact much appreciated by his radio producers. Harvey, in short, was a very good broadcaster. There was perhaps something else about his work that facilitated the repeated appearances of his work on BBC radio at the time, and that was something inherent in the very nature of the Forest of Dean as he described it. The Forest of Dean was (and is) a very particular sort of countryside.

[61] As described in Chapter One, earlier ideas about the Forest, as well as his own first hand observations and research informed Nicholls' books in the mid-nineteenth century. They found expression in the Forest novels of, Thomas Mayne Reid, Ada M. Trotter, and Tom Bevan; and permeate Bellow's tourist guide *A Week's Holiday in the Forest of Dean,* that had first appeared in the 1880s and by 1924 was into its fifth edition (Standing, 2013, appendix). They can be found in Mabel K Woods' 1912 publication *Newnham-on-Severn A Retrospect* (which included history of the wider Forest of Dean area as well), and in Arthur O. Cooke's *The Forest of Dean* (1913).

Harvey's distinctive Forest of Dean presented a picture of a countryside whose characteristics may have had an especial appeal for inter-war radio. These same qualities may have also ensured that Forest of Dean literature would continue to appeal to radio broadcasters in the post-Second World War period too. Peter Mandler makes a compelling argument that an untroubled, preservationist nostalgia for a pre-First World War countryside (as referred to above by Brace, 2003; and Street, 2006; for example) was in reality far from a mainstream concern between the wars. Mandler points out that, for example, Stanley Baldwin's evocations of the centrality of the countryside to English identity has been 'more often quoted in the 1980s than in the 1920s' (Mandler, 1997, 173). He suggests, furthermore, that though there was a recognition of the recreational value of the countryside, there was a general hostility to the old patterns of rural land ownership and deference to the squire class, and thus all the symbols of that. So much so, he argues, that the BBC's programming about the countryside was carefully calibrated to take this into account focusing instead on the countryside's value as leisure amenity. Harvey's evocation of a Forest of Dean countryside, whose identity was wrapped up in a tough, self-sufficient, 'communistic', people, confident in their *own* (rather than any squire class's) ancient land rights, would be a vision of a countryside that would, it seems, have been far more in step with the times. In this respect, for the BBC the Forest of Dean and Harvey's version of it in his wiring, was a relatively safe countryside: one in which a long history and present identity could be explored, its land owned by the crown (or state, in effect everyone) rather than a privileged, elite landed gentry.

My Friends the Foresters, was Harvey's most substantial radio series on the Forest, but he had already broadcast on the topic as early as 1929 with three fifteen-minute programmes: *The Forest of Dean – Its History* (*Radio Times*, 1929a), *– Its Beauty* (*Radio Times,* 1929b), and *– Its Inhabitants* (*Radio Times*, 1929c). He would return to the theme again in the 1940s and 50s. Through all his radio programmes about the Forest of Dean, with his authority as a writer and skill as a broadcaster, often with humour too, he brought the distinctive

Forest to a mass audience. Whilst Harvey was the most important communicator of a distinctive Forest identity in the early twentieth century, other Forest authors would continue to present a similar vision of the Forest of Dean through the broadcasting of their literary work too.

Between Harvey's first programmes in the 1920s, and the recording of the *Forest Talk*, album in 1981*,* broadcasting would play a part in several other Forest of Dean authors' careers and in the sharing of their literary portrayals of the Forest with a wider audience. Leonard Clark could be heard repeatedly on the radio in the 1950s and 1960s, often on the theme of the Forest. Harry Beddington appeared on BBC Television's *Tonight* in 1961 (T.B., 1961) as he published his book *Forest of Dean Humour* (1961)*,* and in 1976 on BBC Radio 4's *Down Your Way*. BBC Radio would prove the catalyst for Winifred Foley's writing career in 1974, and for Dennis Potter whose early ambition was to write a novel (Carpenter, 1998, 86), television would prove to be his ultimate vocation, the Forest of Dean featuring in several of his television dramas[62], and on the radio in his programme *A Christmas Forest* (1977).

None of these writers were working in cultural isolation, their work in the twentieth century part of wider cultural production and consumption. The role and impact of broadcast media in particular on regional identities, and on how these manifested in Forest of Dean literature, was of some significance, though far from straightforward in its effects.

The Impact of the Forest on the Radio

As radio and later television developed, increasing its range of content and contributors, and as technology allowed reporters to become more mobile, broadcasting would bring the wide world directly into the home of its listeners and viewers. Even so, broadcasting would on the whole be dominated by the voices and content emanating from urban centres: for radio during much of the

[62] *A Beast with Two Backs* (1968); *Pennies From Heaven* (1978); *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) though it never explicitly mentions the Forest nor filmed there, its dialogue in Forest dialect was highly suggestive of a Forest of Dean setting; *The Singing Detective* (1986) *Cold Lazarus* (1996), and on the radio in his *A Christmas Forest* (1977) programme (Gilbert, 1995, 323-363).

century that meant Broadcasting House in London. Regional broadcasting was, by comparison, poorly resourced. Content was also tightly controlled by the BBC in London, and when distinctive regional content *was* on air it was often confined to broadcasting its own region (Read, 1964, 252-256). Despite this broadcasting did play an important role in the nation coming to know itself in all its regional variety. Through a mixed diet of national and regional programming listeners, who may not have travelled far from their home village or town, were hearing about other, different places: they were discovering that their own home patch was different in many ways to the rest of the country. Just as improved road, sea and river transport had first awakened the Tudor topographers to the variety of peoples, landscapes and places in the kingdom, so the growth of the railways in the nineteenth century had further accelerated this process. As Phyllis Bentley, writing in 1941, put it, until the advent of improved communications 'Yorkshire did not know it was Yorkshire, nor Somerset Somerset' (Bentley, 1973, 12). This could similarly be applied to the growth of radio broadcasting, the Forest of Dean coming to know via the radio that it was a distinctive and different place, different to the rest of the country. Bentley (13), also feared that at the same time as regional differences were becoming more apparent, regional identities were at risk of being lost, in part due to the advent of broadcasting itself. Through Harvey's writing heard on the radio, his listeners (amongst whom would likely have been some of the future Forest authors) were recognising that the Forest of Dean was not the same as everywhere else, and was instead a place with a culture and identity of its own.

As Deeks has pointed out (above) Harvey's role, through his writing being broadcast in the first part of the century, was significant in popularising the idea of a distinctive Forest of Dean. The Forest he presented would become something that people would begin to feel was worth preserving in the face of homogenising social and cultural forces being experienced, ironically, via mass broadcasting itself. As other authors began to write their Forest of Dean literature they would share similar ideas and stories about it as a place as Harvey

did. One of these, very much in the tradition of Harvey's material heard on the radio, would be Harry Beddington.

Harry Beddington

(1981 - 1986)

When The Forest Bookshop closed in 2015 it was still stocking Harry Beddington's book *Forest Humour.* The book had been first published in 1977 by Forest of Dean Newspapers Ltd. Its content was a combination of text from his two self-published books *Forest of Dean Humour* (1961), and *Forest Acorns* (1962), with the addition of one new poem 'To Man', and new illustrations by local artist and arts teacher Eric Rice. Comments on the inside dust jacket of *Forest Humour*, indicate how popular his two previous works had been, describing the first as having 'met with immediate success', whilst his second 'proved to be equally popular'. In 1961 the first one thousand copies of *Forest of Dean Humour,* had sold out within three weeks, with three hundred of the second edition pre-ordered even before it went to press (*Dean Forest Mercury*, 1961). By the time the *Forest Talk,* album that featured Harry was released in 1981, Harry was locally a well-known and much loved author. Whilst the local success of his books owes much to his choice of subject (the Forest itself), his unusual choice to write almost entirely in Forest dialect, and his views on a range of topics seeming to have chimed with his readership, his level of recognition also helped secure readers for his books. In 1961 Beddington was already a well-known and appreciated local figure. The local newspaper review of *Forest of Dean Humour,* points out that he had already 'been a favourite entertainer at Forest parties', and refers to his poems 'Who killed the bear,' [sic] and 'A Christmas Carol' as 'old favourites' (T.B., 1961).

Smoking Parties, Clubs, and Developing Work Through Performance

The parties referred to in the newspaper review above are described by Forest memoirist and poet Joyce Latham (born in 1932) in an interview recorded in 1999. She remembered 'smoking concerts', as an integral aspect of the Forest's social life and says that these were put on typically to raise money for some local person who may have fallen on hard times. In *The Glittering Coffin* (1960), Dennis Potter referred to them as 'a benefit smoker' (44), typically put on by miners for someone poorly, or injured in the pit. Billy Cann, writing in the 1980s, saw them as evidence of the Forest's communal spirit:

> Anyone down on his luck, and a smoking concert would be arranged in a pub. You'd buy a ticket for sixpence and also be expected to do a turn – sing, tell jokes or play an instrument, to raise money for the cause.
> (Cann, 198?, 22)

For Joyce Latham they were 'impromptu', affairs featuring local entertainers, with the audience joining in. They were put on in the local pub or social club and the whole thing 'was just entertainment to ourselves on a weekend around here' (Latham, 1999). Joyce remembers going to them as a young girl, taking part by doing a turn whistling tunes, and later performing her own poems. Potter, who was born (1935) and grew up in the Forest around the same time as Joyce, paints a detailed and vivid picture of such evenings at his local Berry Hill Club[63] in *The Changing Forest* (1962).

The club was, for Potter, the centre of working class social life in the Forest so he spends two chapters of *The Changing Forest* (Ch8-9), looking into

[63] The importance of the club in the social life of the village is a theme Potter returned to in *The Singing Detective* (1986). The club is where the young Phillip's mother plays piano and his father sings, and in a later scene where a performance by them both with a family friend is the moment that a chance gesture betrays hidden infidelity. As in *The Changing Forest*, for Potter the club is the social stage in which the social good and ills of the village are on show.

the (changing) role of it in his home village[64]. He remembers a Saturday night out at the club several years before, that evening it being almost full by eight o'clock. At first there is conversation, drinking and smoking, and then the entertainment for the evening begins. 'The singers are called up to the small platform jutting out in front of the piano' (Potter, 1962, 132), Potter's father being one of them, his mother on the piano a favourite too. Each singer is known for particular songs, strict convention ruling that no one else should sing their personal anthems. Later everyone joins in with communal singing. After a short break in the entertainment Potter family friend Cyril Baglin is called up to the stage 'and already the audience is beginning to laugh in anticipation', because as Potter declares:

> Cyril is undoubtedly one of the most gifted and fanciful comedians I have ever listened to. But Baglin's humour could not be transplanted, for it is intensely and devastatingly local in accent, pace and subject matter. (Potter, 1962, 134)

Sharing Stories

As with Potter's family and other neighbours who sing and play music, Baglin is not a professional performer, rather for this moment simply a village celebrity known and appreciated for his act that he performs in the club. By way of an example of Baglin's material, Potter recounts him telling the story of a travelling salesman doing his rounds in Berry Hill. During thick fog the salesman is looking for the particular house of a particular person, this local context of the story prompting recognition amongst the audience:

[64] He uses two contrasting visits to the club, some years apart, to illustrate this. In his most recent visit the old symbols of communal life such as pictures of the village rugby team have been replaced, the space painted over in gloss pastel shades of paint. There's a large television set in the corner now and also a fruit machine, or 'one armed bandit' as Potter calls it indicating his distaste. Membership has declined by over two hundred in six years, the club secretary telling Potter '"The young people just don't want it, and that's all there is to it"'(Potter, 1962, 121).

> Yes, they knew the one. It was dark there at night thanks to the tall hedges. How nice to have a joke about nice old Thomas.
> (Potter, 1962, 136)

The salesman knocks at the door and after much confusion finally realises that, in the thick fog, he has mistakenly called at the door of the outhouse (outside toilet) rather than the main house. The fundamental elements of the story could work anywhere, but the details situate it unmistakably in *their* village. The importance of locating these stories firmly in the Forest of Dean, and in a particular neighbourhood here, is also seen in the writing and performance of Harry Beddington, and Foley, Morgan, Latham and Tandy. Often these stories are told in the first person, as if they happened to themselves, and often they feature real people the audience might know. The veracity of the stories is not vital to the enjoyment of them, rather it is the inclusion of local detail and the impression, created by the mention of named individuals, that they involve real local people. Sometimes the stories centre around the local stock characters Jolter or Jarge. Fascinatingly, some of the stories become shared (whether willingly or not is unclear) between the various Forest performers and writers, details changing in each version yet still told as if they are true.

Baglin's story as reported by Potter in 1962 (and if Potter is to be believed it was told several years before in the heyday of the club) much later reappears as a seemingly genuine experience of Dr Bill Tandy in his 1978 book *A Doctor in the Forest.* Tandy calls on the house of Thomas, in his version a Thomas Oliver who, similar to Baglin's version, lives near Berry Hill. Again, it is during a very foggy night. After a similar level of confusion to Baglin's salesman, Tandy delivers his punchline, Thomas (in Baglin's version it was Thomas' son) explaining to Tandy through a crack in the door '"this baint the 'ouse. 'Ouse be up the garden path. This 'ere's the privy"'(Tandy, 1979, 33). Though no evidence has yet come to light of Tandy performing his material in public prior to publication, it is possible that Baglin picked the story up from Tandy (who was in the Forest from the 1940's onwards) or vice versa, or indeed from the real 'Thomas Oliver'

himself. Regardless, this is not the only such story to have been recycled in this way.

Harry Beddington recounts Sam Phelps returning from a rare trip to London telling 'the Station chap "Thou const pull them rails up now"' (Beddington, 1961, 4), the beer in London being no better than the beer at home, so they've no reason to go back there. The very same story element appears in Winifred Foley's *In And Out of the Forest* (1992), first published in 1984, but this time it is Bodger, at Gloucester station on route home to the Forest from London, who tells the assistant station master '"You can take up your rails now guv'nor, for I shan't want to be goin' up there again"' (20). Again Foley may have picked this up from Beddington, she was settled back in the Forest at this point, or it may be based on an actual event, the story of which was simply doing the rounds in local conversations.

The social club or smoking concerts were places where local stories could be told, picked up and passed on from one story teller to another much like any successful joke. Though the details may vary the fundamental elements that make them work remain the same. In Baglin's version of the tale the man who mistook the outhouse for the main house 'were selling educational books' (Potter 1962, 136), whilst in Tandy's version it is himself, the educated professional, a GP, who makes the mistake: both protagonists undone by failing to see clearly through the local fog. This is just as Harvey's 'gentle soul, Of mild enquiring mind' (2017, 1), was undone by the opacity of local legend. It is the conventionally educated person, full of academic (book) rather than practical learning, and from outside of the Forest, who is undone by pre-judgment based on their assumed educated superiority. The educated visitor thinks that the person behind the door simply has not grasped what they, the caller, require, or are perhaps paralysed by a risible rural shyness. At the punchline it becomes apparent that the caller has completely misread the situation due to them failing to see what is right in front of their eyes. For both Beddington's Sam Phelps and Foley's Bodger, a trip to London is simply confirmation that they have everything

they need in the Forest[65] and have no reason therefore to revisit, what is for them, the irrelevant capital. This story provokes a laugh at the expense of the figure of the innocent Forester abroad, but at the same time allows for a feeling of satisfaction that yes, we are content with our lives in the Forest, far better than life in the big city. These two replicated anecdotes are concrete examples of what more broadly are a series of shared ideas and thinking that permeates much Forest of Dean literature: outsiders too often assume Foresters are rural idiots when in reality it is them that are; and that the centre of interest and value is the Forest, not elsewhere (see Chapter Four).

These smoking concerts, and other impromptu entertainments at social clubs, pubs and other venues, were opportunities to practice material and its performance, as well as pick up stories or ideas from others, just as Harvey had done in the local pubs earlier in the century. Here were settings in which what was valued, what would work, and what wasn't and might not, could be tested out. For Harry Beddington, important as these parties may have been in this respect, he had another significant opportunity that would allow him to develop his writing and try out his ideas, and it also acted as his introduction into writing: he got involved with local amateur drama scene.

Harry Beddington and Forest Amateur Drama

Fifteen years before Harry Beddington published *Forest of Dean Humour*, The Village Drama Society had published a small centre-stapled booklet by him, his short comedy drama *Footing the Bill: A Farce in One Act* (1946). Rediscovering this forgotten publication during the course of this research has opened up a significant aspect of Beddington's work. At the same time it has afforded a deeper insight into the rich cultural life in his home town of Cinderford, and the wider Forest, during the immediate pre-and-post second world war period. Coming to an understanding of this wider context has

[65] A reminder of Rudder's assertion, as noted in Chapter One of this thesis, that 'their own country is sufficient for them, without being obliged to any other part of the kingdom' (Rudder, 1779, 38).

revealed the origins of Beddington's writing. Far from a being a rural backwater, the Forest instead enjoyed a vibrant cultural life. Through my initial conversations and correspondence with Harry's family, and through my archival research, what has become clear is the central role that the lively local amateur drama scene played in the development of Beddinton's writing and his performance of it, and in him becoming a recognised local personality. In addition, the evidence seems to support the Beddington family's assertion that it was his wife Mildred's passion for drama that first drew Harry into writing. As his friend Mary Pollard put it in her thanksgiving service address following his death, Harry and Mildred supported each other's creative passions, and in Mildred's case this was 'for music and drama' (Pollard, 1986).

[66]Mildred Beddington became involved in amateur drama through the Bilson[67] Women's Institute (W.I.) appearing in their their production of *No Servants*, a one-act comedy by Gertrude E. Jennings, in 1939 (*The Citizen*, 1939). The play was performed at the Forest of Dean W.I. Drama Festival held at the Miners' Welfare Hall in Cinderford, and Bilson's production was described by adjudicator Miss Isabel Chisman of Bath as 'good entertainment; very slick; very light,' but 'not a good choice for the festivals'. There were performances at that event too from Cliffords Mesne W.I. and Longhope W.I., with Mitcheldean W.I.'s production of *Many Ways,* awarded best play in the competition (*The Citizen*, 1939). Testament to the scale of local drama activity in the period, two years previously the Forest Drama Festival of 1937 saw an even larger number of local groups (non-W.I. in this case) competing from across the Forest. There were two groups from Cinderford alone (Deancroft Players, and Cinderford Dramatic Society), each group competing comprising of an A and a B team with each team staging a different production (*Gloucester Journal*, 1937). There was then, during this period, a flourishing amateur drama scene in the Forest of Dean, part

[66] I have previously shared much of this section's content on Mildred and Harry's involvement in local drama, and its wider context regarding the Village Drama Society in a blog post for *Reading the Forest* (Griffiths, 2019).
[67] A neighbourhood of Cinderford.

of a wider movement encouraging and supporting rural amateur drama across the country.

Mary Kelly, in Devon, had founded the Village Drama Society in 1918 and it quickly grew into a movement that encouraged groups to set up in other areas, with Mary regularly a guest speaker at Women's Institutes around the country (Wallis, 2004). Evidence that there was interest in the society's work in this region, their annual general meetings were being reported in some detail in the *Gloucester Journal,* as early as 1922. Of some significance in regard to Beddington's later drama and other writing, it was reported that the society's president, (the Cornish author and critic Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch), reminded those attending the meeting that they should value, not seek to eradicate, the local dialects of their performers (*Gloucester Journal*, 1922). The British Drama League (British Drama League, 1944) too had been formed in 1919, its aim being to support the rebuilding of British theatre after the war, and by its second year it was also making links with Britain's W.I.'s including judging at their drama competitions. The Forest of Dean became part of this wider effort to build drama into rural social life and this was supported at a Gloucestershire county level. The event in 1937, mentioned above, was part of Gloucestershire's Village Drama Festival, supported by the Rural Community Council, with events in the Forest at Longhope and Lydbrook (*Gloucester Journal*, 1937a). Though the earliest evidence of Mildred Beddington's involvement in amateur drama suggests 1939, it is possible that an earlier date may be found for both herself and Harry[68]. Certainly Harry's 1944 script for *Footing the Bill*, suggests an author with some experience already in writing drama.

Footing the Bill[69]*,* was the entry for Cinderford's MINTEC (Mining and Technical College, then in Cinderford) Players in the Gloucestershire Music and

[68] The Beddington family have discovered more drama scripts amongst Harry's papers, as yet undated, and at time of writing as yet unseen by myself.

[69] The play features married couple Jarge and Liza Gabb, neighbour Jenny Harri, and Jarge's step-brother Sam. When Sam gets his foot run over by 'the vire injun' (Beddington, 1946, 5) [fire engine], the neighbours compete to demonstrate their care for him hoping to get a share of the potential compensation. Some great knockabout humour follows on the realisation that he might be insufficiently injured, Jarge then trying to inflict with a fire poker more significant damage to Sam's leg.

Drama Festival of 1944. The farce had topped the scoring in the qualifying round held at Cinderford's East Dean Grammar School, an event that saw more than a dozen entries from across the Forest of Dean including W.I.'s, schools and youth club teams (*Gloucester Journal*, 1944). Beddington's play went on to win in the county-wide finals held in Cheltenham Town Hall, the cast of four including both Harry and Mildred. It was produced by Mr W. J. V. Aveston of East Dean Grammar School who, in a report on the event, was credited more broadly with 'The development of the dramatic art in Cinderford' (*Dean Forest Mercury*, 1944a). Apart from Cheltenham itself, Cinderford had the largest number of entries in the festival (*Dean Forest Mercury*, 1944a), again demonstrating how vibrant the amateur drama scene was in the town. The newspaper coverage of the win captures how well the play was received:

> Mr Leo Baker, the County Drama Adviser, announcing the play, said when he saw it at Cinderford he could not understand much of it, but the audience rocked in their seats all the time. If the Cheltenham audience were mystified by "thee bist" or wondered what a "butty" was, they also were also convulsed and gave the players the biggest applause of the evening.'
> (Dean Forest Mercury, 1944b)

Another review of the play pointed out that a different play had been leading the competition until Beddington's play:

> brought us back to dear old Gloucestershire with a good rollicking comedy straight from the Forest of Dean. Spoken in authentic dialect […] Here was true native comedy at its best'
> (Dean Forest Mercury, 1944c)

In sympathy with Quiller-Couch's entreaty to respect local dialect, Beddington's play was written entirely in Forest dialect and this seems to have been much appreciated by both audience and judges. Although he would occasionally write poems and newspaper pieces in standard English, this play signals Harry Beddington's intention that his primary authorial voice would be

read and heard through Forest dialect. He would go on to perform in, produce and write (all, as yet, unpublished) several more plays.

In 1950 Beddington appeared in (as well as co-producing) MINTEC Players' production of Eden Phillpotts' *Devonshire Cream* (Dean, 1950), and only a month later appeared in another play, this one written by himself, *Talking Turkey.* Described as a 'topical comedy', it was put on by Bilson W.I. as part of their Christmas party, with eleven other W.I. groups as guests at The Miner's Welfare Hall in Cinderford (*The Citizen*, 1950). Of the unpublished plays written by Harry held by the Beddington family, two have so far been examined in the course of my research, and are both set in the Forest of Dean.

Homespun (n.d.), can be found represented today online by a single photograph of its performance thought to have been some-time in the 1950s (Moore, 2006). With access now to the full script it can be revealed that it is a comedy-drama set in a local Home Guard unit[70]. Though there is, so far, no evidence to link the details of the plot to any real events, it seems likely the setting for the play was inspired by Harry's own role in local Civil Defence during World War Two (R. Beddington, 2015). The other play so far seen, is *Limbo: A Thriller in Three Acts* (1959), written and produced by Beddington, and performed by the MINTEC Players at East Dean Grammar School in 1959, both Harry and Mildred taking parts (Beddington, 1959). Again the script clearly states that the play is set in the Forest of Dean and, like *Homespun*, features some dialogue in dialect, though in this case only for one character who was played by Harry himself. This chilling gothic tale is some way from the farcical knockabout of *Footing the Bill*. The story[71] appears to have, in-part, been

[70] The Beddington family remember Harry telling them that he sent the script to the BBC only for it to be turned down, sometime later *Dad's Army* appearing on the TV. No evidence has so far been found to support this. All of the soldiers with the rank of private within the unit speak in Forest dialect, and it is the non-dialect speaking, snobbish Captain Trench who is found to be working for the enemy, discovered through the efforts of the Forest-dialect-speaking privates.

[71] Scene one is set in 1850, and in the same location scenes two and three are set in 1950. The story centres around a mysterious Black boy. In scene one, in 1850, it is revealed that the boy had followed the sea-captain Denver back from Africa and has become his man-servant. The boy had followed him in pursuit of a stolen sacred head that Denver has taken. In 1950 Denver's descendant rediscovers the sea-captain's diary amid strange stories of a ghostly Black boy. Eventually the boy's body is found behind a hidden panel in the house.

inspired by a ghost story attached to local house Littledean Hall. The house has spawned several stories of hauntings but the one that links to *Limbo* is connected to the portrait of the eighteenth-century owner of the house pictured next to a young Black slave boy. The story of the ghost[72], and the historical events that are purported to be behind them, appear briefly in Cooke's *The Forest of Dean* (1913, 190), and also in Wood's *Newnham-on-Severn: A Retrospect* first published in 1912 (1962, 145). In Beddington's version few of the original details remain the same though the underlying element of betrayal of the boy remains, as does the setting of a large old Forest house fitting the description of Littledean Hall.

The two unpublished scripts recently examined, and Beddington's published script *Footing the Bill*, demonstrate that long before Harry Beddington took to publishing his own books, and many years before the arrival of The Forest Bookshop, he was developing his skill as a writer and performer in the field of local amateur drama. His writing was drawing on local stories and local settings, often using Forest dialect, and were written for performance by local people, to be performed primarily in front of Forest of Dean audiences. The number of plays and performances by Beddington, and the success of them, demonstrates that by the time he came to publish *Forest of Dean Humour*, in 1961, he was not only a well-recognised local writer, but also a writer who had developed a good understanding of what local audiences responded to. His version of the Forest of Dean as a place, community, and identity were well honed by the time they appeared in his poetry and prose in print.

Harry Beddington's 'Comments On Things In General'

Harry Beddington's prose and poetry writing of the early 1960s, brought together in the single volume *Forest Humour* (1977), is, as might be expected by

[72] More recently the story and its historical origins appears with greater detail in Sue Law's *Ghosts of The Forest of Dean* (1982), a copy of the real portrait of the slave boy with the Hall's owner the book's only illustration. The same ghost story and location, though not mentioned explicitly, are at the centre of Tiffany Murray's 2014 novel *Sugar Hall*, stating in her acknowledgments (270): 'Stories of the Boy were told in my school playground when I was a knock-kneed girl. He haunted a local house – Littledean Hall – and he does to this day'.

the title, often comic in tone. A typical example is his description of the view on reaching the top of the hill above Cinderford approaching from Gloucester. At the top of the hill are stunning views:

> If thouse look due West thou const [can] zee a whole range o' the Welsh Mountains stretched bevore tha' and, if thouse turn around and look due East, thee costn' [can't]
> (Beddington, 1977, 11)

For his local audience the comedy here works based on the disappointment of expectation, as the hill Beddington is describing famously gives two views, the one looking East providing spectacular views of the Severn vale and Gloucester that his audience would have expected him to mention. He had a well-practiced knack for comedy, and though there are local references the majority of it works for any readership. In this opening section of the book Beddington quickly brings his reader into the Forest, much as Harvey did by guiding us into the landscape over the Severn from Bristol in *My Friends the Foresters*. This establishing of place, where we are, where the Forest is and what it is like, is to varying degrees a key element of most writing about the Forest, whether the perception is that it is aimed at someone who knows nothing about the Forest, or at a local resident.

The establishing of where and what and how it is distinctive, its very specificity, is vital to Forest of Dean literature in which place is so fundamental. In similar fashion Winifred Foley in *A Child in the Forest* (1974) would start with her village, part of a Forest of Dean that 'was remote and self-contained' (13), cut off by the Severn on one side and the Wye on the other. Tandy too, would similarly describe the Forest's location, then explaining its identity through comparison with the landscape and people he had known in India 'both ancient civilisations' (Tandy, 1979, 15), before a rapid race through Forest history, from before the arrival of the Roman legions to the present day.

For Beddington the Forest is not well known to people 'outzide the Vorest' (1977, 11), and he says that even people who live here don't know all of

it. He is very specific in his description of where the Forest is, local government boundaries ignored, instead the 'Vorest praper' [proper], is defined by its landscape-type, so as soon it becomes 'all agricultural as 'twere and the ground is all vlat' (11), that for Beddington is no longer trully the Forest. He suggests the best way to find it is to follow the Severn from Gloucester until Elton Corner, then turn right and start climbing. This of course brings the reader, the notional traveller, to Cinderford, Beddington's home town, well into the heart of the Forest. First published in *Forest of Dean Humour*, in 1961, this is the exact same route through which Dennis Potter would approach the Forest in his 1962 book *The Changing Forest*, having taken the bus from Gloucester. Beddington though quickly introduces more humour through a connection between people and landscape that Camden himself (linking the barbarity of the Forest's inhabitants with their habitat amongst the trees) would surely have admired:

> Zome volk da complain that them up there be a bit rough. Well, that's as maybe. I daresay if thay were livin' up there wi' all them trees around um thay'd grow a bit o' bark somewhere and it's bound ta show sometimes. (Beddington, 1977, 12)

This provides the opportunity, 'the bark', for Beddington to lead into a funny story about a postman and a dog. There are descriptions of the Forester character in this opening chapter but the priority is making the reader laugh, bringing them onside through familiarity, descriptions that chime with the audience's sense of a community identity – if not always exactly how they might see themselves, maybe a neighbour or relative fitting the description. By the second chapter of *Forest Humour*, though, mixed with the humour, Beddington begins to introduce his comments on the contemporary world, very much through the local lens of events in the Forest of Dean.

As much as *Forest Humour*, is an illustration of humour linked with Forest of Dean characters and places, it is also Beddington's 'comments on things in general' (1962, 1), as he explores such topics as local government, nationalisation, education, class snobbery, and the European Common Market.

Harry's friend Mary Pollard, again speaking about his book *Forest Humour* at the Cinderford thanksgiving service after his death in 1986, said:

> But those of us who have read "Forest Humour" know that it is not a book of Forest Jokes. In it, under the dialect presentation, Harry's deep concern for his native Forest, for the country and in fact the world, is clearly expressed. He felt passionately about injustice and bureaucratic red tape, and was impatient and exasperated about the way that man made a mess of God's intention for His creation.
> (Pollard, 1986)

Apart from the humour there is indeed also a sense of exasperation within Harry Beddington's polemic as he takes aim at those in power, whether in charge of nationalised industry, local or national government, or those in charge of education policy. At times he comes over as deeply conservative, railing against change, but this is because he sees these changes as ill-informed, poorly thought through, and having a detrimental effect on society.

Beddington is highly critical, for example, of recent developments in education that, as far has he is concerned, has lost sufficient emphasis on the basics of teaching reading and writing. He looks to the recent past and in particular his own childhood as a simpler time when, for example, children were taught in the local village school and so were better integrated into the life of their village, school playing its part in supporting an inter-generational cohesion. He picks through various issues in detail including the eleven plus exam; the policy of labelling some children as Educationally Sub-Normal (of which he is highly critical); and the expectation that all teachers should be qualified to degree-level. Beddington was writing from a position of some authority on education having long been in post as Official Correspondent to the Forest of Dean Primary Schools Managers and Clerk to the Governing Bodies of the Secondary Schools (Bilson Women's Institute, 1965). His position on education was, as with the many other issues he tackled, one that frequently values practicality above overly academic or abstracted ways of thinking. Whether in

politics, education, sport, religion, economics or morality, he advocates common sense:

> A diet of pure knowledge, selective and intense
> Acquired with solemn ritual, in establishments immense
> Too often leads to fat, mostly underneath the hat
> Unless it is diluted with a lot of common sense.
> (Beddington, 1977, 128)

Whilst easy to characterise his bemoaning of change as simply the nostalgic grumblings of an aging man (he was in his early sixties when he was publishing his books), the majority of his more serious critique of particular issues is detailed and well thought through.

A similar tendency, this general sense of frustration with bureaucracy, in some post-war culture and writing was identified by David Matless in 1994, in particular in the work of W. G. Hoskins. Matless argues that Hoskins' *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955), presents a rural England that offers an alternative vision that is opposed to the prevailing, barbaric modern. Matless also cites the 1952 film, *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, as a story in which there is 'hope of the redemption of England from a state of bureaucracy and commercial values, once more to be a place of localities' (Matless, 1994, 31). These ideas can be seen clearly emerging too in Beddington's work.

When Harry Beddington wrote on any issue it was also from the perspective of someone deeply rooted in his community. He had been born and lived in Cinderford for all of his life and was deeply involved in its cultural life as playwright, producer and performer; he had a role in the town's civil defence during the war; and worked with local schools. In Beddington's more serious writing about what concerned him, the characterisation of the Forester's politics put forward by F. W. Harvey seems to neatly sum up his position. In *My Friends the Foresters* (1935), Harvey had said that the Forester was 'intensely conservative', whilst also 'socialist […] His very conservatism is socialistic, since it is founded upon common rights' (Harvey, 1935, Part 3). Harvey was talking specifically in that instance about the rights to common pasture but this could

be extended to include a sense of common purpose, a kind of communistic common-wealth too. Beddington's position comes from a conservatism that seeks to protect a more mutually supportive communal life in the face of 'the lack of lead by leaders 'an betrayal o' standards by them who should set a pattern' (Beddington, 1977, 148). Beddington is reflecting a view that sees the local community in the Forest of Dean as a source of mutuality and support . At the same time there is an expectation that individuals demonstrate a level of self-reliance and individual responsibility. In a sense, this is neatly summed up by Beddington in his epigram at the head of the final chapter in *Forest Humour*, in which he warns against the dangers of not taking personal responsibility for decisions:

> If thouse let other people think var that thou'lt get what thouse deserve – wi' interest
> (Beddington, 1977, 148)

Beddington's Use of Forest Dialect

As Harry Beddington published *Forest of Dean Humour*, in 1961, the narrative of dialect disappearing was invoked by the reviewer in the local newspaper, the *Dean Forest Mercury*. The commentary presents, however, a more nuanced description of the process, dividing it into three phases:

> In the first everyone in a locality speaks it, in the second all the school children speak dialect out of school and English in, while in the third and final stage everyone speaks English.
> (T.B., 1961)

T. B. believed the Forest was instead well into the second stage, and rather than seeing Beddington's work as halting the process, it was instead to be valued as a record for posterity for students of linguistics, conceding, in effect, that it would be lost as an everyday form of speech. At the very same time, Dennis Potter noted that still, amongst many of the older Foresters' speech, there could be heard a 'spattering of chapel language', and 'many

distinctive local words', but acknowledges that speech in the Forest was a 'jungle of change', particularly amongst the young (Potter, 1962, 10-11). This is the context, of dialect on its way out[73], in which Beddington decided to write his books entirely in dialect, and in this respect he is unique amongst Forest authors.

Beddington's stated reason for writing in dialect[74] was that it was simply to 'enhance the flavour' (Beddington, 1961, 2), of his writing. It was though, also, informed by his success at competition with his farce *Footing the Bill* (1946), and its subsequent publication. As mentioned earlier, Quiller-Couch's expressed enthusiasm for dialect within the Village Drama Society may have influenced Beddington's move to writing his drama in dialect. Remembering too that much of Beddington's writing was rooted in his own public performance, his adoption of a dialect-speaking Forester persona may have been influenced by the popular radio and music-hall entertainer Cecil 'Chick' Fowler. Fowler performed as the character 'Gloucester George', and could be heard on BBC regional radio programmes telling amusing tails in Forest dialect (Cestrair, 1937), throughout the 1930's, at one point performing for Queen Mary, and broadcasting in America (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 1949; *The Citizen, 1949*). There is evidence too, that the performance of Forest dialect as a party piece pre-dated Fowler by some years, to at least the beginning of the century. A report on a school opening in Lydbrook, for example, noted that a Mr. Williams had given an 'amusing recitation in the Forest dialect' (*Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 1909). By the 1930s, possibly influenced by hearing Fowler on the radio, it was reported that Messrs C. Buffin and E. Johnson of Cinderford (Harry's home town) had performed at a concert in Mitcheldean, both of them being described as 'Forest dialect comedians' (*Gloucester Journal*, 1937b). Beddington's performance and writing developed then in an environment in which dialect performance was a form of popular local entertainment.

[73] Nicholls, writing in 1863, had already suggested that Forest dialect was already most likely in the second phase yet a century after Nicholls, it had still not disappeared altogether.

[74] Beddington's writing not only transcribes specific pronunciations it also uses distinctive local vocabulary. With an eye to perhaps a wider readership, as well as those Forester's for whom dialect had fallen out of use, Beddington included a glossary in *Forest Acorns* (1962, 65) and in *Forest Humour* (1977, 158-159)

Forest dialect used by Beddington conferred on himself the identity of the dialect-speaking, working-class Forester. This was partly a comic character, but once Beddington had used this to win his audience's attention, he then also used the same dialect voice and writing to tackle serious issues of the day. Forest dialect, in his hands, is a means of winning the trust of the audience, and demonstrating solidarity with an archetype of an authentic Forest identity: working-class, dialect-speaking, an exponent of wry wit, with an intelligent and a practical, common sense understanding of the world. Beddington is, in effect, powerfully re-appropriating Forest dialect to become a signifier of a *positive* Forester identity, and as a legitimate language with which to discuss serious issues not just comic stories. With no known extant record of Fowler's performance it is hard to comment on the nature of it but it seems likely that his act may well have been purely comedic rather than dealing in polemic. In this respect Beddington's use of dialect for tackling in some seriousness the issues of the day is arguably a radical linguistic act. Beddington wants to be taken seriously, and by extension is asking that Forest dialect is taken seriously.

Whilst Beddington's books in Forest dialect often make references to the past, unless it is the recounting of anecdotes (themselves not used in any especially nostalgic manner) is often within the context of discussing issues of the present, and so too with many of his poems, notably 'The New Technique' (1961, 35-36), a comment on the nationalisation of British industries. His use of Forest dialect is not so much a performance of a Forest or Forester of the past as it is a language of the present, but deliberately chosen to convey a geographical and class specificity, and an authenticity of voice. Taavitsainen and Melchers (1999), suggest that in dialect literature (such as Beddington's, as opposed to dialect used *in* literature) dialect's 'functions are social rather than literary', and it's use is to 'strengthen patriotism and solidarity' (13). This is dialect used as a means of identification, and a means of engendering community cohesion. Just as the men in the ranks of the Home Guard in Beddington's play *Homespun,* speak in dialect, this providing a point of identification for Beddington's audience, so too in his books, Beddington's authorial voice, through its use of Forest dialect

becomes that of a working-class, dialect-speaking Forester (rather than the standard English speaking, educated, professional class Forester that he was in reality). In the work of Beddington, and later Morgan, Forest dialect becomes ever more significant as a key aspect of Forest identity. It is in this sense a means of delineating a distinctive Forest identity.

Harvey's and Beddington's Forest

There is much in Beddington's work that is reminiscent of Harvey. In his poem 'Quitchurch Quarry', for example, the lines 'The mem'ry of zome eveil deed, Were tangled in the leaves' (Beddington, 1977, 141), is reminiscent of Harvey's 'Devil's Chapel', with its similar notion of past evets being marked in the landscape. In the same poem Beddington also says that Foresters are lucky in being able to roam freely through the woods 'Free ver thee ta please theezelf, And exe nobody's leave', a fact often so fundamental to life in the Forest that it is rarely commented on. Many of the places people can find in the Forest are quiet, peaceful, and as such 'zet [set] the 'eart at rest', much like Harvey's places that are a source of spiritual renewal. The woods, for people familiar with them, are not as Camden put it 'so very dark and terrible' (Gibson, 1722, 269), or as John Moore wrote 'shadowy shapes […] as if they wanted to pounce' (Moore, 1954, 101). The woods, for both Beddington and Harvey are on the whole places to be in, enjoy, and at times seek out as a special source of psychological or spiritual balm. The landscape is also a place of people. What initially appears as natural, the forest is in reality highly managed, its tree planting and harvesting, and other seemingly natural flora and fauna, the responsibility of the Forestry Commission (now Forestry England). The landscape is also marked with the evidence of thousands of years of human activity. From its many distinctive scowle[75] holes (Devil's Chapel and Puzzle Woods being the most extensive and well known examples) marking ancient iron mining, to the spoil heaps and industrial remains of the coal industry, the quarries, former railway lines and

[75] Nicholls suggests the word is a corruption of '"crowl," meaning "caves"' (Nicholls, 1858, 4).

remnants of World War Two US Army camps, these remains are a reminder of the human past in the landscape, the inescapable evidence of the peopled nature of this place.

What Harvey and Beddington both shared was a deep affection and care for the Forest of Dean. Harvey's love and use of dialect in his writing would be exceeded by Beddington who wrote almost exclusively it. Just as Harvey would adopt it, in performance and in writing, so too Beddington. Despite being a life-long Forest resident dialect was not Beddington's day-to-day mode of speech either (Deeks and Llewellyn, 2016). Though never attracting the critical acclaim of Harvey, Beddington's work was similarly diverse. They both wrote drama (Beddington more fully committed to that form than Harvey); both wrote comic verse and serious poetry (Harvey more prolific and acclaimed in poetry); both occasionally wrote for children (Harvey in his radio programmes, Beddington's children's stories, as yet unpublished); both sought to explain the Forest and the Forester, and in this regard whilst Harvey may have primarily been aiming this at an external radio audience, Beddington was looking more to confirming this sense of identity within a Forest readership. In respect of their work on the Forest a line of literary descent might loosely be traced from Catherine Drew and William Wickenden to both Harvey and Beddington: Drew's poems that describe the Forest's history, its people and places in her present times, and the issues it faced; Wickenden's (occasional) joy in using dialect, his descriptions of the rambunctious Forester friends, his humour and his diversity of issues he was happy to write about. In terms of Harvey and Beddington's own literary descendants perhaps the closest might be the poetry and performance of Keith Morgan.

Keith Morgan

(1942 -)

In a research interview for this theses Keith Morgan (Morgan, 2017) explained his route into writing and performing poetry. Born in Coleford the son of a miner, Morgan attended the town's primary school before joining Bells Grammar School. It was during this time that he took up a Saturday job working at the local barbers, something he continued (to this day) after completing his engineering apprenticeship, and working full time at Rank Precision Industries (later to become Rank Xerox) in Mitcheldean. He says that the barber shop has been a source for many of the stories that surround his poems and make up much of his performance material too. It was also, in effect, his route into publication. Publisher and owner of The Forest Bookshop, Doug McLean, spotted Morgan's poems in the barber shop. Morgan had been a keen amateur photographer and had written poems as captions for his photographs on display in his barber shop where McLean came for a haircut. McLean went on to publish Morgan's first collection of poems, *The 'Azards o' Chimuck Szwippin'*, in 1978. Soon after its publication Harry Beddington wrote to Morgan to introduce himself, and offer encouragement to Morgan as a fellow poet. They would go on to perform and record together[76].

Morgan's poems share many similar themes with Beddington, and indeed Harvey, in regard to what they chose to reflect about life in the Forest. Morgan's first poem, for example, 'Up Fer The Cup', deals with the violence of a local rugby match, all humorously described in dialect, starting:

> If thee bist fond o' aggro
> Then thee con watch a yup,
> When Drybruk da ploy Yarkley
> In thic Combination Cup
> (Morgan, 1978, 8)

For Harvey, in *My Friends the Foresters* (1935, part 3), he wonders if '"hereditary memory"', of border skirmishes between the Welsh and the Foresters may play a part in the 'keenness', of engagement when they play at

[76] Morgan also points out that countryside author Fred Archer would often join them for local performances too, as at one point Archer was temporarily living in the area.

rugby. Harry Beddington also comments on the vitality of clashes between local teams at rugby, an excuse for a wonderful few lines recounting a shocked spectator asking how often someone gets killed at such a match. The linesman over hearing 'looked round an' grinned. "Only once, Missues," 'im zed. "Only once"' (Beddington, 1961, 4). Another element of life in the Forest that Morgan and Harvey considered worth special celebration is the pub. Morgan has a poem on the pleasures of drinking beer 'There Byunt Nothin' Like Good Ale!' (1978, 42), and the company to be found in the pub in 'Zupper at the Local' (1985). Harvey wrote the lines 'Sing a merry bottle-song; Let the tankards clink!', in 'Song for My Sons', and in the poetic tirade 'A Curse' (Harvey, 2017), he listed all the damnations he wanted visited on a local landowner that wouldn't allow a pub on his estate (Boden, 1998, 294).

Morgan's fascination with the Forest's characters, stories, and dialect, evident in his verse and performance, also led him into other work focusing on Forest of Dean identity. Morgan was a founding member of the pressure group Dean Forest Voice, their main aims being to 'promote and maintain the Vurester identity and enhance the pride and culture of the people of the Forest of Dean' (Dean Forest Voice, 2015). Morgan has written and produced three small booklets for them, *Outa Spake Varest* (n.d.,a), *The Commoners* (n.d.,b), and *The Vree Miners* (n.d.,c). In short form the books seek to explain each of their topics, each written in dialect suggesting a clear inheritance from Beddington in this respect.

Morgan's efforts to promote dialect have gone beyond his own writing and performance. He has also been the leading figure in establishing an annual Forest dialect poetry competition, the winner being appointed Forest Bard for the year, and he also helped establish the annual Forest Faddle evening. Loosely based on the Forest of Dean Eisteddfods which had started at the end of the nineteenth century (Jurica, 1996c, 382), and appear to have faded out shortly after the Second World War, the Forest Faddle features various Forest poets and entertainers, brass bands, and musicians, and each year's Forest Bard. Though not explicitly stated in his poems, (they are instead a capturing of a distinctive

Forest culture and history), Keith Morgan's other efforts demonstrate clearly his concern that much about the Forest has been at risk of being lost, (a theme picked up later in this chapter). His use of dialect, like Harvey and Beddington before him, has been a part of describing and perpetuating the sense of a distinctive Forest of Dean: a marking out of its cultural distinctiveness. His two volumes of poetry (his second, *Albert's Dree Wiker*, was published in 1985) remain a warm and evocative expression of the place, people and stories of the Forest. Along with McLean he remains a living link with the authors of the mid-twentieth century who contributed to the later flourishing of Forest of Dean literature. One of the most significant of these, Winifred Foley, is who we turn to now.

Winifred Foley

(1914 - 2009)

Winifred Foley is to date the most successful and widely read author of Forest of Dean literature. When she died in 2009 obituaries appeared in *The Guardian* (Hudson, 2009), *The Telegraph* (2009), *Independent* (Smyth, 2009), and *The Times* (2009) newspapers, testament to her level of recognition beyond the Forest. After she died *The Daily Mail* (2009) serialised her book *Full Hearts and Empty Bellies*[77] (2009), and BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* marked her passing by broadcasting an interview recorded only weeks before her death. During her lifetime her auto-biography *A Child in the Forest* (1974), was adapted for television twice, first for the BBC as a single play *Abide With Me* (1976), then under its own title for HTV in 2001. It was also adapted for the stage by David Goodland, making its debut in 1989 at The Swan Theatre in Worcester were it achieved 'the highest box office of any show in the history of the Swan' (*The Stage*, 1989).

Foley's work has also been cited in numerous academic papers and books on a wide range of topics, such as: women in domestic service in the early twentieth century (Giles, 2009; Taylor, 1976; Todd, 2009; Wall, 2004); women's history in general (Bruley, 1999; Glastonbury, 1979; Todd, 2004); family life (Gillis, 1997); history of the working class (Todd, 2015; Benson, 2003); rural childhoods (Ward, 1988; Cloke and Milbourne, 1992); and on the subject of living with neighbours (Cockayne, 2012). Her autobiographical writing has been used as valuable first-hand social history source material, the voice of a working-class woman who grew up in rural mining community during the General Strike, went to work in domestic service jobs in both urban, provincial and rural settings, and a woman who witnessed Oswald Mosley's Black Shirts march in London's East End: all of this recollected in just her first book.

[77] A retitled paperback re-issue of *A Child in the Forest* (1974)

Much of the framing of Foley and her work has contributed to the notion of her writing as a simple, straightforward account of her experiences: a naïve memoir untainted by literary considerations. In reality this is far from the case as my research for this thesis reveals that Foley in fact made efforts to have her writing heard long before *A Child in the Forest,* was first broadcast, and then published, by the BBC. This radical reframing of Foley will show her to be a dedicated writer since childhood, who as an adult was repeatedly trying to get heard and, or, published.

Foley's apparent route to becoming published has been well documented, John Hudson in *The Guardian* (2009), amongst others, explaining that she had sent in a collection of handwritten notes in response to an appeal by social historian John Burnett who was looking for accounts of working people's lives. Burnett went on to publish *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People,* in 1974, and it featured a contribution from Winifred Foley[78]. Her autobiographical notes found their way to regional BBC radio producer Pamela Howe who brought in Virginia Browne-Wilkinson to adapt them for radio. In 1973 Foley's memories of her Forest of Dean childhood were broadcast as a serial on BBC Radio 2's[79] *Woman's Hour*. It was later adapted as a book by the BBC and published by them in 1974. The book was a success, with two BBC reprints in 1976 (Foley, 1974, 4), later editions by The Forest Bookshop, and a reissue in 2009 under the new title *Full Hearts and Empty Bellies.* Placing the success of Foley's first book in context Hudson explains that it arrived at a time when people were looking for escape into a simpler 'real or imagined', rural world, typified by the success of books by James Herriot, Flora Thompson, and Laurie Lee (Hudson, 2009).

In the north of Gloucestershire, farmer Fred Archer had around this time begun to publish his stories of the farming community of Ashton Under Hill and Bredon at the turn of the twentieth century. His first book *The Distant Scene,* had appeared in 1967 and several more similar books by him were published

[78] His 1982 follow-up collection, *Destiny Obscure*, featured a contribution from Winifred's husband Syd about his growing up in London's East End.
[79] *Woman's Hour* would later move on to BBC Radio 4.

before Foley's first book came out. This again demonstrated that there was a market for this sort of work.

Shortly before Foley's debut there had been developments in the world of academic history too. Indicative of an increasing interest in history seen through the accounts of working people was Pike's 1966 *Human Documents of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.* Raphael Samuel (1994, 38), points to E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class,* published in 1963, and Peter Laslett's 1965 work *The World We Have Lost,* as examples of a broader '"History from Below"', scholarship movement that was seeking to 'give a voice to the voiceless' (viii). In the Forest of Dean too, there was a developing popular interest in working people's memoirs that looked back to life at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. These Forest memoirs locally reflected the shift in taste towards this type of history and reminiscence.

Forest Memoirs

In 1971 Forest of Dean Newspapers had published *Hard Times in the Forest of Dean.* This single volume brought together extracts from Timothy Mountjoy's 1887 book *62 Years in the Life of a Forest of Dean Collier,* with *The Forest in My Younger Days,* the then unpublished recollections of Fred Boughton, a former Forest miner and sheep badger born in 1897 (22). In the preface, T. Bright[80] sets the combined volume in context:

[80] Bright had been part of the team that established the Forest of Dean Local History Society in 1948 (Gloucestershire Heritage Hub), and wrote a book himself on nonconformity in the Forest (Bright, 1953). This is presumed to be the same as 'T.B.' cited elsewhere in this thesis.

> Before the memory of the old ways have passed from memory we thought it important that the kind of life lived by our Forest ancestors should be preserved for posterity […] Those who read the book will be transported back to a time when life was cruel, wages low, hours of labour long […] Education was rudimentary, child labour frequent […] And yet shining through these pages is a feeling that the whole Forest community was one, that not only the duty but the desire of neighbours to help one another […] Historians can make the past live, but these two men are Forest history.
> (Mounjoy and Boughton, 1971, v-vi)

Bright's preface might equally have later been applied to Foley's description of the Forest of Dean in *A Child in the Forest*[81]. Bright suggests that the Forest was at a point of irrevocable change, key aspects of its identity (the mining industry, and the keeping of free-roaming sheep, both specifically mentioned) about to be lost. The only thing to be done was to preserve their memory. There is a nostalgia evident in the evocation of a community that was united, partly due to religious feeling but also because of 'the fellowship of the mine' (vi), (heavy leanings in Bright's preface towards a male orientated version of history and local identity). In this preface Bright set a determined agenda that *Hard Times in the Forest of Dean,* be taken as an important historical record.

Reading the book it becomes clear that its intention is to be an historical record, with little pretention to being any sort of artistic endeavour. It is notable in this regard that Mountjoy's poems in his original 1887 publication (Anstis, 1996, 174), are not included in the republished extracts, the editor (Bright?) not wishing to detract from the book's significance as a documentary source. The primary concern is to create a record of history and in combining the two of them, moreover, there is implied a historical continuum, connecting the Forest of Mountjoy's memory to that of Boughton's. The two accounts combined,

[81] An explicit link is made in Bright's newspaper, the *Lydney Observer,* between Boughton's reminiscence and the broadcast of Foley's *A Child in the Forest* on the radio: 'Following Fred Boughton's reminiscences interest in the Forest of the earlier part of this century is growing. Winifred Foley of Huntley has written a serial "A child in the Forest" which the B.B.C. are broadcasting' (*Lydney Observer*, 1973, 12g)

Boughton's picking up where Mountjoy's left off, implied there had been a seemingly shared continuous culture that was only now, in 1971, about to finally be lost. A way of life that had endured for one hundred years was only now on the cusp of disappearing. Though both accounts include anecdotes of a sort, they are matter of fact recalling of incidents, none of the practised humour and wit of Harvey or Beddington here, nor the depth of reflection or analysis evident in Potter's *The Changing Forest* (1962). What *Hard Times in the Forest of Dean,* did do though, was to tap into what was becoming a fascination with the past, including the more recent history, of the Forest of Dean, and in particular those aspects that seemed part of its distinctive identity. This was also reflected locally in the appetite for more scholarly histories of the Forest of Dean, in particular those written by Cyril Hart published during the 1950s, 60s and 70s[82]. There was too the recent (1966) reissue of Nicholls' *The Forest of Dean* (1858). What *Hard Times in the Forest of Dean*, signalled was a developing local interest in a more personal, social, history of the Forest, itself a reflection of the broader national mood both popular and academic. As Foley's memoirs chimed with that readership looking for accounts of a rural past, her work also spoke to this developing local interest in the Forest's social history. In terms of Foley's writing it had far less in common stylistically with Bougton's dry, factual recall of events, as it did with the more expansive, narrative style of writing by another Forest author, Leonard Clark.

Like Foley, Clark had moved away from the Forest of Dean, in his case at the age of twenty-five as a trainee teacher. He would often re-visit the Forest, and it would feature in his poems, radio broadcasts, and his autobiographical writing, but he would never move back to the area. Foley, forced by economic circumstances left at fourteen years old to take up a job as a live-in maid in London. Far from being a victim, it was her decision to go to London, rather than the nearer town of Cheltenham, 'determined to be mistress of my own fate

[82] *The Verderers and Speech Court of the Forest of Dean* (1950), *The Commoners of Dean Forest* (1951), *Laws of Dean* (1952), *The Freeminers of the Forest of Dean and Hundred of St. Briavels* (1953), *Royal Forest: A History of Dean's Wood As Producers of Timber* (1966), *Archaeology in Dean* (1967), *The Industrial History of Dean* (1971).

(Foley, 1974, 146). Married and with children she would eventually move back to settle permanently in the Forest. Clark's literary aspirations had been encouraged from a young age by his mentor F. W. Harvey and he had his first small collection of poetry *Between The Hills* (1924),[83] published before he was twenty. He would go on to become a prolific and successful poet, editor, biographer, children's author, memoirist and specialist on poetry in education, as well as regular broadcast contributor. Foley meanwhile would work in a variety of low paid jobs often struggling to make ends meet, literary success coming much later in life. The two writers do though share a common approach to their autobiographical writing in regard to their accounts of growing up in the Forest.

Foley and Clark share a common focus in their work around their memories of the people, places and relationships of their time growing up in the Forest. Whilst Mountjoy and Boughton's more mechanistic approach to their biographies seem driven by a desire to convey the facts and figures of history, Foley and Clark are concerned with conveying their interior emotional lives, the richness of family relationships, the social dynamics of the village, and their broader cultural life. Consecutive chapters in Clark's *Green Wood* (1978), for example, first published in 1962, are titled 'Sarah' (his beloved step-mother who adopted Clark as a baby), 'Aunts', 'Uncles', and 'Cousins,'. In Foley's *A Child in the Forest* (1974), there are chapters called 'Dad', 'Mam', 'Granny and Grancher'. Both writers also approach their chapters as satisfyingly stand-alone episodes, portrait-pieces or essays around a theme of village life, both for example writing about the institution of the Sunday school, or chapel, treat. Of the two, Foley's is the one struck through with the impacts of poverty, choices limited, promise shown at school thwarted by the necessity to leave to earn a living. Clark's in contrast is full of expectation, poems published in the local paper, books read, plays seen, and a developing network of useful contacts. As Clark's career as a poet and author grew, his reminiscences of his Forest

[83] I am grateful to David Price for allowing me access to this rare book held in his extensive private collection.

childhood, many of which would find their way into his Forest memoirs, could be heard on BBC Radio in the 1950s and 60s. The first episode of *Three Country Characters,* on BBC Radio Home Service in 1957, for example, was about Charles Walding the Cinderford blind organist (*Radio Times*, 1957), who later appeared in Chapter 9 of Clark's *Green Wood.* Whilst the clubs, pubs and smoking parties of the Forest offered opportunities for Beddington, Morgan and Latham to road test their material, Clark's status amongst the literary establishment afforded him BBC Radio as his literary test bed. Radio for Winifred Foley would, in contrast, act as the very catalyst that launched her career as a published author and thus make a significant contribution to the literary portrayal of the Forest. What has now become clear, through my research for this thesis, is that her aspirations as a writer date back as far as Clark's.

Revealing a New Narrative for Winifred Foley, Author

As described above, the conventional narrative of Winifred Foley's writing career is that of a primitive, authentic voice; a writer in the rough discovered by the BBC. With the help of BBC producers her writing was made ready for radio, and thus the unsuspecting elderly Foley was launched into a modest literary career. My research work in the BBC Written Archives with material that, according to Archive staff, had not previously been accessed by scholars, enables me to put forward a different picture of Winifred Foley that shows she had been writing and trying to get her writing heard several decades previously. Arguably, Foley's ambition as a writer dates back to shortly after leaving school.

In *A Child in the Forest* (1974), Winifred Foley recalls being promoted to the top class at school after the Headmaster had come across her poems. This new class was the one taught by Miss Hale, who took a liking to Winifred. Later, on Winifred's fourteenth birthday, she took her and Winifred's friend to tea at her home and to the pictures (Foley, 1974, 141-146) as a treat before Winifred

left school. A significant influence on her, Miss Hale also read to the class books such as *Treasure Island*, and *Lorna Doone*, and as Foley comments:

> This wasn't just "doing the classics" – as she went along, we followed spellbound. Everyday life became richer. Learning new words was like having a key to free the imprisoned thought I had been unable to express.
> (Foley, 1974, 50)

Foley's description here of literary language and writing as a means of self-expression, is a key theme in what would be her early attempts to get her work read. Her father, a coal miner, was another significant influence for her, and he was well-read too 'self-taught to appreciate the works of Darwin, Einstein, and Marx; and books such as Erewhon*,* Tess of the D'Urbevilles, Pickwick, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist'[84], (Foley, 1992, 135). The importance of her own reading, often guiltily grabbed between household chores or paid work, often appears in her writing, with her also noting that as a child 'Very little printed matter that came into our house was censored from us' (Foley, 1974, 133). Finding time to read was important to Foley and she was exposed to a range of work, literary classics as well as girls', and later film, magazines too. As well as being an avid reader, long after leaving school Foley was also still writing. After her first spell in domestic service in London she had briefly returned to the Forest, only to soon take up a succession of domestic posts in and around the region, before returning to London again. Whilst working as a maid in a ladies' college on Tottenham Court Road she 'tried desperately to write it all down' (228), though she admits to destroying most of it when she left to take up another new job. Foley continued to write though, and in 1954 she started to send some of her writing into the BBC.

Research in the BBC Written Archives, accessing previously unopened files, reveals a number of submissions to BBC Radio by Foley long before her supposed debut in 1973. What the evidence in the archive shows is that Foley

[84] The original formatting has been reflecte here, i.e. the book titles were not italisized in the original.

saw herself as a writer who simply could not help but pursue her need to write. Expressed within her correspondence, and as evidenced by the sheer number of submissions sent in to the BBC, is the picture of a writer compelled to do so in order to express herself and her thoughts, and to be heard. This is not, as has to date been portrayed, the elderly lady who, almost by chance, simply sent in her hastily scribbled reminiscences to the radio in the 1970s. Foley, who was indeed finally published as a result of her serialisation by *Woman's Hour*, in 1973, had by that time already been sending off stories, poems, and scripts to the BBC on and off for nearly two decades. This research challenges presentations to date of Foley, her work, and her aspirations as an author.

On 14th April 1954 Winifred Foley sent in her first piece of writing to the BBC, a six-page, handwritten autobiographical story recalling an event in 1925 entitled *An Episode in My Childhood by W. Foley* (Foley, 1954a). At this point she was once again living in London, so she was asked to come in to the BBC in person for a meeting with Miss I. D. Benzie of the Home Talks Department on 30th July. That same day, after the meeting, Benzie sent a memo to the Deputy Editor of *Woman's Hour*:

> I should like you to see these papers as, having now seen Mrs. Foley, I must tell you that she seems to me to be a remarkable find. [She] comes from the Forest of Dean. She is now forty, married with four children. A very comely and intelligent woman who goes out charing to increase the family income, and mitigates the boredom of repetitious housework by "writing things in her head" as she goes along.
> (Benzie, 1954)

Benzie was so taken with the originality of Foley and her writing that she was inspired to suggest a whole series of similar accounts from women for the programme. Foley must have been encouraged by her meeting with Benzie because, by September 1954, she had sent a second speculative script (that one eventually receiving a polite rejection). Foley's submissions to the BBC at this time were accompanied by her hand-written letters, and reading them they

have a slightly apologetic tone, Foley not wishing to take up the time of the people she is writing to, conscious that they must get sent a lot of material, and concerned her work may just not be good enough. Whilst on the one hand her letters lack the assurance of a writer already confident in their own abilities, (one can imagine the confidence with which Clark would have corresponded with the BBC), on the other hand they also demonstrate a subtle determination to overcome this, driven by an insistent need to write and be heard. This is neatly encapsulated in her letter to Benzie on 1st September 1954 accompanying her second manuscript. Foley asks for forgiveness for her impertinence but explains it is:

> because of the itch in my fingertips to write which has worried me for some years. Is my irritation as the blister to the heel? or daring thought, the pearl to the oyster?
> (Foley, 1954b)

She has to write but is it any good? Foley is daring to hope that it might be good enough, be picked up by the BBC, and find an audience. Either way she simply has to write anyway.

On the 7th October 1954, (nearly twenty years before *A Child in the Forest* was heard on the radio), her writing finally found an audience. Foley was called in to BBC Broadcasting House to read her story *An Episode in My Childhood*, re-titled as *Remembrance of Things Past: A Miner's Child in 1925*, broadcast live on BBC Radio's *Woman's Hour* (Sims, 1954). Despite a suggestion that she come in early for rehearsals so there would be time to amend the script, no changes were actually made to the script. Comparing Foley's original handwritten submission with the transmission script, they are word for word the same, testament to Foley's latent talent as a writer. Her straightforward, first-hand account tells of being packed off to London as a small child to stay with strangers during a time in the Forest of strikes and severe economic hardship. Here, in what as far as we know was Foley's first piece of writing to be heard beyond her family, is Foley's authorial voice, already fully developed, and one that would become familiar to listeners and readers of *A Child in the Forest*.

This same story would go on to feature in *A Child in the Forest*, in the chapter titled '1926', with just a little more descriptive detail, but essentially the same in the book as in her hand-written version of 1954.

Though Foley was not successful with all her submissions to *Woman's Hour*, she would continue to send in work to the BBC, and it would not be long before she was on air again. As Benzie would write, in a memo to *Woman's Hour* producer Lorna Pegram the following year, about another submission from Foley:

> She has a great deal to contribute [and] has, I believe, a much deeper urge to write than have very many women who have "taken up writing" and send us scripts.
> (Benzie, 1955)

As far as Benzie was concerned, here was a compelling working-class female voice, a contrast to other women who might, perhaps, be simply writing for pleasure. Foley *had* to write as a means to express herself, fitting it in around her work, not simply as a means of leisurely distraction. In October 1954 Foley wrote in again, this time sending in poems, an immediate response, she admits, dated the same day, to an item she had just heard on *Woman's Hour*, listed in the *Radio Times* (1954), as 'Dream Poems by Hilda Morris'.[85] 'My poems will keep pestering to be written down', wrote Foley (1954c), again telling of her unstoppable need to write. Her poems were rejected, but she was on air again in November 1955, this time in an item about household budgeting, 'Ways and Means', herself listed in the *Radio Times* simply as the wife of 'a Gloucestershire wood sawyer' (*Radio Times,* 1955), her husband Syd's job at the time. Foley had written in responding to a previous item on the programme, and in a letter from producer Lorna Pegram, asking for more information, Pengram also thanked her for the further reminiscence pieces Foley had sent in (Pegram, 1955a). Whilst her poems (sadly, not in the BBC Written Archives) were rejected, Foley was

[85] Most likely the children's author and poet Hilda Morris Bodenham (Ponymadbooklovers, n.d.).

clearly considered good value as a contributor speaking for the hard-pressed working-class woman, whether remembering the poverty of her upbringing, or on the present day challenges and sacrifices made in providing for the family. Her appearance in the 'Ways and Means' feature, much to Foley's embarrassment, had clearly struck a chord with the audience: so concerned were they for her not being able to afford a new coat for fourteen years that several were sent to her by well-meaning listeners, with more offers of other items of clothing too (Foley, 1955).

Foley continued intermittently to submit writing to the BBC. In a letter dated 13th June 1961 she mentions, by way of credentials, that 'enough consideration', had been given to a script of hers three or so years previously, that BBC producer David Thomson had visited her, adding 'however nothing came of this' (Foley, 1961). In this same letter Foley pitches, what today reads as, a remarkably unexpected idea for a story to come from her. Winifred Foley, who would become much read and appreciated for her touching, often cosy and amusing stories of a bygone Forest of Dean, was proposing a story about the managing of sexual 'aberration' within a marriage. Her proposed story, for which she submitted a first chapter, is centred on young mother living in a city slum of the 1940s:

> The discovery that her husband suffers from a sexual aberration (Lolitism). Her struggle to rid herself of the cocoon of sexual inhibition which contribute to his failings. She wins, though it means supplanting one aberration for another the desire of the husband to be physically and mentally dominated. Somehow she strikes a balance and achieves happiness.
> (Foley, 1961)

Though she also adds that this story plays out against a background of poverty, as much of *A Child in the Forest*, would, this is clearly a significant departure from the work that readers came to know and love from Foley. Her accompanying submission, the first part of the story, (again, sadly not held in the archive), was rejected. The unexpected nature of this story, in light of Foley's

subsequent work, is yet further evidence that Foley was already a determined writer, and one willing to explore a range of genres and themes, long before *A Child in the Forest*, was aired on the radio. Was this particular story simply not well-written enough, or was it just not the sort of thing that *Woman's Hour*, at this point in its history was prepared to broadcast? It is unclear exactly which part of the BBC she had sent it to, and what their reasons for rejecting it where, but wherever it ended up it went no further. Though towards the end of her life Foley would write four short novels[86], all set in the Forest of Dean at the start of the twentieth century, her strength and appeal as a writer clearly lay in her autobiographical writing, and it was this that would launch her career as an author.

It would be some time before her work would be serialised, and then published, by the BBC, but they had again, as early as 1962, recognised the quality and value of her autobiographical writing. Referring to a manuscript entitled 'Memories Are Made of This', a letter from the BBC Talks Department suggested Foley send it to a publisher (Stevens, 1962). A memo to the Department a week earlier, from Eileen Molony at the Natural History Unit in Bristol, said that the work had been 'languishing', at the BBC as it was 'too good to reject outright', but also 'too difficult to place', her view being that 'it ought to be published for its historic interest' (Molony, 1962). Though there is no evidence, as yet, of Foley having sent her manuscript to a publisher at that point, before her success on the radio with *A Child in the Forest*, she did get a piece accepted and published (Foley, 1981, 182), in *The Countryman,* magazine (Foley, 2002), titled 'Tess', appearing in 1970[87] (Foley, 1970). She was also of sufficient interest to the BBC to be asked to appear on a BBC Televison West programme in 1971. Molony's view that Foley's work was worthy of a publishing contract would eventually, of course, be proved correct. The BBC itself would publish *A*

[86] *Village Fates* (2000), *Prejudice and Pride* (2005), To Kill For Love (2006), and *Two Men and a Maiden* (2007).

[87] In *Back to the Forest* (1981, 182-183), Foley recalled sending in a piece about her grandmother to 'a quarterly country magazine'. Based on my research it is possible that she misremembered this, confusing her submission to *The Countryman* with an earlier submission to the BBC about her grandmother that was retained by Lorna Pegram (Pegram, 1955b)

Child in the Forest, but only a few days after the first of ten episodes was broadcast on *Woman's Hour*, on March 19th 1973, they received the first of two letters from other book publishers. The first one, from The Harvill Press Ltd (Villiers, 1973), was followed a few days later by one from Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, this one noting 'enthusiastic reactions amongst our editors' (Hills, 1973), and asking if the rights had been sold yet. Hodder and Stoughton were Fred Archer's publisher and they clearly felt Foley's work would tap into the same market. As the BBC would find out, there would be one final hurdle to overcome before Foley would see her work in print, and this would be a challenge to the validity of aspects of Foley's account of her life growing up amidst hardship and poverty.

Hudson's obituary in *The Guardian* (2009), alludes to a 'sibling feud', prompted by her writing. Papers in the BBC Written Archive reveal that this took the form of a formal solicitor's letter on behalf of Winifred's sister, after the broadcast but ahead of publication of *A Child in the Forest.* The letter from Keith Scott solicitors says that Foley's story had not only 'caused offence', to their client, but also offence to others in the family and 'other inhabitants of the Forest of Dean' (Scott & Company, 1973). The letter suggests that provided the story is not published no further action will be taken. The suggestion that it had caused offence more broadly to local people is spurious. Experience in looking at local reaction around the same period to Dennis Potter's television programmes concerning the Forest, demonstrates that when people in the Forest were offended by such content they did write into the local newspaper. Exploring the local newspaper during the weeks following the broadcast of *A Child in the* Forest, reveals only one letter, and that one in praise of the serial. The letter from E. Moore, (the same Emily Moore who had written criticising Potter's *A Beast with Two Backs,* above), praises Foley's account for its accuracy in capturing the hardships of life at the time, (and also praises Foley's teacher Miss Hale) (Moore, 1973).

A fascinating and detailed record of what exactly caused such offence to Foley's sister is preserved in the BBC Written Archive (Foley, 1973). Annotated

pages of script show handwritten comments added, seemingly by Foley's sister herself, with responses in another hand (presumably Foley's editor), as part of what clearly became a negotiation ahead of publication as to what would be cut and what not. Almost all of the comments are in regard to Foley's writing suggesting the family grew up in severe poverty, or, rather, the effects that had. One section, for example, in which Foley suggests there was never enough water to wash the bedclothes, is described as 'wicked lies', another section about family debt to an insurance man is marked as a 'pack of lies'. A section in which Foley described herself and her siblings as 'flea-bitten, runny-nosed, dirty', is underlined, the note added simply saying 'Mrs Foley must speak for herself'. The objections are not so much about the fact that the family may have been poor, rather the effects this did or did not have on them. Any suggestion that they were not well looked after is objected to by Foley's sister.

It is possible Foley, as a writer, was simply wishing to create a vivid picture for her readers, and perhaps wishing to temper the picture of an all too cosy and idyllic rural past, overdoing to the point of invention the levels of hardship resulting from their poverty. Certainly the objections noted in the scripts seem to suggest this, Foley's use of poetic licence within the autobiographical form upsetting the personal narratives of her sibling. The handwritten notes on the script in the other hand indicate acceptance of most of the cuts, suggesting alternative wording for others. An internal memo in the collection indicates that legal advice was sought by the BBC, and the matter was eventually resolved: publication went ahead and Foley's first book went into print.

Winifred Foley: The Literary Talent

What the vehement objections from her sister reminds us is that autobiography is, of course, as open to contest regarding its validity as any other form of writing. The assumption that Foley's account is a simple, straightforward and truthful narrative, a documentary source for historians, is part of a wider narrative surrounding her and her work that wants to see her as an innocent;

unencumbered by literary considerations. Finding that she was a quietly ambitious writer, exploring various literary forms, recontextualises her and her work. Though there is little evidence to suggest Foley fabricated any significant aspects of her memoirs, she does deserve suitable critical attention as a literary writer rather than simply a naïve documentary source. Whilst the role of the BBC in launching Winifred Foley's career as a writer is indisputable, the larger narrative built around it has perpetuated the notion of a talented but lucky amateur, her writing appearing from nowhere in response to the project of an academic historian. There is a hint, too, in the obituaries' emphasis of her raw, handwritten stories' *adaptation* for radio by Virginia Browne-Wilkinson, and the role of producer Pamela Howe, that Foley's untutored writing was not fully formed at the time of *A Child in the Forest.* With Foley's full, original transcript not in the BBC Written Archives, it is unclear what scale of intervention was required to make them ready for broadcast, however, based on the evidence regarding her first story broadcast in 1954, perhaps very little. Certainly Doug McLean, who published a re-issue of *A Child in the Forest*, and was himself responsible for publishing *No Pipe Dreams For Father* (1977), has, at the many local talks he has given about his career in publishing, repeatedly stated that Foley's writing was wholly her own, and needed very little in the way of editing to ready it for publication. The Cinderella-type narrative, of the naïve talent discovered by, and launched through, the magic of metropolitan broadcast media, has been simply too attractive to pass up as it foregrounds the role of the BBC in her discovery. At the same time it emphasises the authenticity of Foley as a genuine, raw, working-class woman's voice. The reality was that this working-class woman was quite determined to get her writing heard, on air or through publication, and had been knocking at the door of the BBC, with occasional success already, for nearly two decades before *A Child in the Forest* was broadcast.

Foley, and Forest Dialect as Evocation of Belonging and the Past

In the work of Winifred Foley, Forest dialect is an evocation of both the Forest of the past, and the voice of her family. Although it is not used for her authorial voice, her young self, 'Polly', as she was known as a child, as character in her own autobiography, does use dialect, for example here in this warning to her dad:

> "Yus, Dad, and if thee doosn't come and start getting thic coal in, our Mam'll be making *thy* eyes pop out o' thy yud!"
> (Foley, 1974, 41)

It is notable though, that in the latter part of *A Child in the Forest* (1974), Winifred Foley, now a young woman and living away from home, no longer uses dialect. Dialect for Foley is an evocation very much of the past, both her own, her famly, and of the Forest. Similarly, in the work of Joyce Latham. Two of Latham's three poems in dialect in *Poems of a Forester* (1991), 'The 'order of the Bath' (bathing in a tin bath in front of the fire), and 'Down the Garden Path' (outside toilet) are symbolic of a vanished lifestyle in the Forest. In Billy Cann's memoir *Son of the Forest* (198?), Forest dialect is too a symbol, largely, of times gone by. Cann writes that 'it is only in one or two places now that you can hear the Forest dialect really spoken', sympathizing with the comments of a fellow-Forester who told him, '"We've gone all posh now"' (29). Forest dialect is associated with the past, and according to the narrative of its always-imminent demise this may have been the case for some considerable time. In this way it is deployed as evocative of the past. In the author's present it can also be used as a means to demonstrate belonging and comradeship, rooted in a shared past. Foley remembers, for example, an encounter with fellow Forester Edna Healey in a television studio:

> "Hello old butty, I've been so looking forward to meeting you!"
> It was Edna Healey, then of number eleven Downing Street. This friendly greeting in the dialect of

the Forest of my youth, which was her birthplace too,
calmed my nerves quite a bit.
(Foley, 1992, 96)

Edna Healey, wife of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Dennis Healey, educated at Oxford, and a successful biographer and non-fiction author, is using dialect as a clear expression of her and Foley's shared Forest identity, and shared past in the Forest. Using dialect, and in particular 'butty' [friend], is the most immediate means with which to do this. 'Butty' is an especially evocative term. Dennis Potter admitted using Forest dialect with his children when they were small, when he wished to be especially 'tender', using '"thee" and "thou"' (Potter, 1993, 5), just, Potter says, as his father had one with him. Meanwhile, ever the detailed analyst of Forest cultural mores, Potter had earlier, in *The Changing Forest* (1962), noted the subtle gradation between the warmth indicated by using 'o'butty', and the more impersonal 'o'but' (13). He also noted that the ultimate means to suggest he had become detached from his Forest identity, was that some of the women who knew him as a child were now calling him 'Mr Potter', this overly formal, standard English address keeping him now at a distance. Another example of Forest dialect being used to express warmth and comradeship is in a poem by Marina Lambert. In one of only two of her poems in Forest dialect in the collection *Forest Folk* (1987), 'Well I Never…', is a monologue delivered as an old friend, down on their luck, is encountered, the narrator welcoming them into their home:

[88]We 'ad our laughs, oy an a feow tears
Wen we was butties in ower younger years.
Goo on, get thee in dru thic door
We'll mek thee a bed upon the floor
(Lambert, 1987, 44)

Dialect within work that is primarily written in standard English becomes then a specialist, highly evocative form, talismanic of the past but also of

[88] We had our laughs, yes and a few tears, when we were close friends in our younger years.
Go on, get yourself in through that door, we will make you a bed upon the floor.

belonging, as McCauley puts it, used for its 'ability to invoke for its audience those things they associated with the dialect' (2001, 297).

Novelist and poet Maggie Clutterbuck has only two published poems in dialect, both in her collection *Digging Deep* (n.d.): ' 'Im Was A Goner', about a fatal mining accident, and 'Tribute to a Vorest Miner', about her father. As a poet who often performs her work, she recently explained that she wrote these dialect poems to 'appeal to the audience I am with', adding that for local audiences the dialect 'reminds them of their grandfathers, especially, or their fathers' (Clutterbuck, 2019). She acknowledges that, of course, the women spoke it too, but for her personally it is closely associated with the male colliers who used it.

Forest dialect used by Foley and these other writers sees it deployed as a highly evocative form, associative of the past and a sense of communal belonging. This associative quality of dialect is also a powerful feature of Beddington's writing, however his, and to some extent Morgan's, is less tied specifically to such evocations of the past in this way.

Foley and Other Female Forest Authors

Foley had identified, whether intentionally or not, in *Woman's Hour*, a cultural space primarily reserved for women[89]. Foley gave voice to a working class woman's experience in the Forest of Dean, something that been absent from Forest of Dean literature since Catherine Drew. Foley told the stories of working-class people in the Forest from a woman's perspective and opened up this field for other female Forest authors who would follow, including memoirs by Gladys Duberly (1978), Jessie M. Stonham (1978), Elizabeth Wolridge (1991), and Joyce Latham (1993; 2008 first published 1994), all of them looking back to the early or first half of the twentieth century.

The work of Winifred Foley and these other female Forest authors, creates an intimate picture of Forest of Dean life, rich in the details of family life,

[89] Ada M. Trotter, in similar fashion towards the end of the nineteenth century had identified the *Girls Own Paper* as a space for her writing, much of it being serialised there.

schooldays, and a network of neighbours and relatives. They also depict the domestic details and challenges of coping with poverty, from the daily chores of fetching water from wells or springs, to the sacrifices made by mothers to put food on the table, to clothe their children, and to look after elderly relatives. There is an intimacy too in their descriptions of the Forest places and landscape, such that their work becomes inescapably tied to place.

These female authors' Forest is one of industry, coal mining in particular a significant feature, and is often portrayed from their perspective as daughters of colliers. For Foley it is her beloved father, and the impact of his involvement in the 1926 strike, that permeates *A Child in the Forest*, and *No Pipe Dreams for Father*; for Joyce Latham it is her sometimes violent and drunken 'Dad' (she was brought up by her grandparents), who suffered from silicosis after a lifetime inhaling coal dust underground, and her kindly Uncle Jim who had been involved in an infamous local pit flooding disaster and rescue in 1902; for Gladys Duberly it is a friendly collier who, returning from his shift, shares some of his remaining bread pudding with her, an opportunity in her book to explain the Forest dialect term of endearment 'butty' (Duberly, 1978, 9). For Latham, mining looms large in the landscape around her too, the Forest being 'full of grey slag heaps, huge mountains of clay and muck thrown out from deep mines' (Latham, 1993, 59). These grim slag heaps though, were Latham's playgrounds as a child, as were the pits' coal trucks and air shafts, and these are as much part of the Forest's landscape as are the trees. That said, nature is an element in this work too. In Latham's poem 'Nature's Cure', it is a source of spiritual rest and renewal:

> A deep forgotten peace invades your soul,
> To prove that nature's cure can make you whole.
> (Latham in Foley et al, 1984)

Nature for Latham here acts in much the same way as it did for Harvey in 'Lydney to Coleford (By Rail)', and just as Harvey's seemingly natural landscapes are also landscapes marked by mankind's impact , as in 'Devil's Chapel', so too for Latham, the love and enjoyment of the natural environment

is tempered by the ever present impact of mining. When, as a child, she moved with her family to a different house, this time right on the edge of the woods, her excitement is tempered by the reality of mining's impact:

> I fell in love with the place straight away, for all I had to do to be in my beloved woods was to climb over a stile beside our back door […] From the outside, our bungalow looked an idyllic rural hideaway […] Unhappily that was not the whole story. The area in which we lived had long been undermined by pits, and subsidence was a constant problem. One of the kitchen walls was nearly split in two by a crack running from top to bottom, and the floor of that room tilted quite alarmingly.
> (Latham, 1993, 41-2)

Like many of their male counterparts, the beauty of the natural environment is often tempered or contrasted with the realities of a hard, practical life, nature and industry in tension. Such is the focus on this, and the other aspects of their lives (family etc. mentioned above), that the natural environment, and trees in particular, are mentioned less often than might be expected. Winifred Foley wrote that, as children, they 'took it for granted that hundreds of massive oak trees bordered our village, that the woods were full of ferns' (Foley, 1974, 14).

These female Forest authors of this period also wear their Forest identities more lightly, with less insistence than say Harvey or Beddington. Even when Foley, repeating Beddington's terminology describes the Forester's distinctive identity, it is less strident, and more an indication of family connections. They were:

> content to be a race apart, made up mostly of families who had lived in the Forest for generations, sharing the same handful of surnames, and speaking a dialect quite distinct from any other.
> (Foley, 1974, 13)

Foley's work is, as with the other female Forest memoirists of this period, without a doubt, tied to the Forest of Dean. Whilst it spoke to that same

readership who were seeking rural nostalgia (as mentioned above by Hudson), and locally who would be reading the work of Fred Archer or Humphrey Phelps, unlike their stories of farming communities, Foley's Forest-set stories included the gritty realities of a mining community; the impact of the General Strike; the life of a child leaving home to work as a domestic skivvy; reference to battling Mosley's Blackshirts. Foley's work in this respect then also responded to the developing desire to read working-class voices. Her combination of rural nostalgia with a working-class voice was played out through the central character of 'Poll' herself (the young Winifred), a female character with agency, trapped by circumstances in a world of domestic service, but also prepared to leave jobs in search of better ones. All of this would give the book an appeal both within the Forest of Dean and beyond it. In doing so, Foley's picture of the Forest of Dean reached a wide audience and readership. This was a Forest of Dean of hardship, iconic images of male dominated[90] coal mining, rugby and brass bands; but in Foley's hands also a Forest of mothers, aunties, grannies, sisters and daughters. Foley's Forest was one of family relationships and a wider network of people. Foley's Forest of Dean was, largely, one that looked back to the first half of the twentieth century. At the time she was writing much of the culture she described was seen to be subject to a terminal decline, something Dennis Potter's book a decade or so before had set out to explore.

The Changing Forest, and Looking to the Forest Past

The decades of the 1970s and 1980s that was such a significant period for Forest of Dean literature was driven in part by a nostalgia for what was perceived as a Forest culture that was rapidly in the process of disappearing. This sense that something was about to be lost was written about by Dennis Potter in the decade immediately prior to this period in his book *A Glittering*

[90] Banding has long since become a mixed gender pursuit; women's rugby union in the Forest now regularly puts players into the England squad; whilst Freeminers now, contentiously, have their first female in the register.

Coffin (1960), in his television documentary *Between Two Rivers* (1960), and then in detail in his book *The Changing Forest* (1962). Much of the Forest of Dean literature that followed would express nostalgia for a Forest of the past, a culture and way of life seemingly disappearing.

In 1960 Dennis Potter[91] resigned as a trainee at the BBC, and his BBC file contains a note explaining that he was resigning '"because he is publishing a book with political bias"'(Carpenter, 1998, 108). That book was to be *The Changing Forest* (1962), and it was planned as part of a series of works by different authors called 'Britain Alive', about different aspects of life in Britain at the time. The editor of the series, Mervyn Jones, described a meeting with Potter in 1960 to discuss the proposed book, in which Potter said that he didn't want to write about himself 'or about real, identifiable people whom he knew in the Forest – "They won't like it", he said. In the end we talked him round' (Carpenter, 1998, 108). Potter had, indeed, experienced a significant local backlash[92] after the screening of his very personal television documentary about the Forest, *Between Two Rivers* (1960), so was understandably cautious. Potter had effectively trailed this new book, and its content, in his first published book *A Glittering Coffin* (1960), that he wrote whilst still studying at Oxford, noting that:

> I cannot hope to convey all that has happened in this district, but intend to produce a detailed study of the breakdown of a district regional identity at some future date.
> (Potter, 1960, 44)

Clearly, Potter wished to explain more about this place that meant so much to him. His second book did see Potter talking about himself, his family,

[91]For analysis of Potter's wider work and career, including the importance of the Forest of Dean to him, see: Fuller, 1993; Potter, 1994; Carpenter, 1998; Cook, 1995; Stead, 1993; Gilbert, 1995; Creeber, 1998, and 2007; Gras and Cook, 2000. For Potter's journalism see Greaves, Rolinson and Williams, 2015.

[92] My research has uncovered several weeks of debate in the letters' pages of the local newspaper at the time of the screening, evidence that how the Forest was portrayed was clearly an issue of some importance and contention.

the people and places he knew and where he grew up. In it he described the changing work patterns as the old industries gave way to the new, mining replaced by new factory work. He wrote about the old social patterns and values being replaced by new aspirations; local cultural identity (a working-class one) rapidly eroding in the face of mass media, advertising, and Americanisation; and about the old speech patterns and the dialect beginning to fade away. Potter was part of that post-war generation who were expanding their horizons and looking to new opportunities in the 1950s, the first wave of academically gifted working class young men and women able (through grammar school education, grants and scholarships), to go on to Oxford or Cambridge, (Potter choosing P.P.E. at New College, Oxford). Potter's generation had been children during the Second World War and were teenagers during the post-war years of austerity, so as they grew into young adults they were aspiring to live in modern housing, own a car, take holidays abroad. With an expanding post-war economy they were part of the birth of consumerism. There were plenty of jobs, and along with these new economic opportunities came a new sense of social freedom too. In the Forest there was a breaking away from the old patterns of life. In *The Changing Forest*, Potter talked to the people he grew up with in the Forest about this:

> "For the first time," said Tony Baldwin, who is exactly my age, "we can breathe a bit. It's possible to do things today without a lot of mumbling in the background, and without being held back all the time. We can become middle-class by our own efforts and our own work, without being holden to anybody"
> (Potter, 1962, 99)

As Potter points out, with the new economic and social freedoms came new choices: branded cigarettes instead of roll your own, the communist *Daily Worker* replaced by *The Telegraph*, signalling shifts in political viewpoints as well with the growth of the Forest of Dean Young Conservatives. What had been a 'communistic', as Harvey put it, comradeship in the Forest also had a strong tradition of self-sufficiency and self-reliance: this was the land of

entrepreneurial Freeminers, when, even after mining was dominated by large-scale outside interests, miners effectively worked as sub-contractors (Fisher, 1981, Ch4). For some Foresters, particularly as they began working in the new factories, sometimes away from the Forest, and as they became better off, the Conservatives began to be seen as better reflecting their economic and social aspirations. Potter regrets much of what is being lost with this rejection of the old values and ways of life, but, at the same time, he also warns against over idealising the past:

> It was a relief that we should be getting the new things, the washing machines, vacuum cleaners and carpets […] When I was born, my father was on two shifts a week, and it took a World War to change that. Now that my mother has a washing machine and a refrigerator you will not find us talking about a threatened dignity or a lost nobility.
> (Potter, 1962, 75)

Potter is not then arguing against greater affluence and greater material ease, he is, however, concerned that certain valuable elements of the culture in the Forest are at risk of being lost: the mutuality and the communality of a social life centred around the club, rugby matches, and the brass and silver bands. This instead is being replaced by 'a greater privacy, a more anxious assessment of oneself and one's neighbour' (78). For Potter though, it is not all bad news, there are moments in *The Changing Forest*, that are more optimistic as he is 'struck by the ways, the scores of deliberate ways' (102), that people in the Forest do resist the advancing commercialisation of society. There was, indeed, much remaining of the Forest identity:

> [T]he Forest is still a one-class area with a common accent and an extremely powerful, almost chauvinistic sense of its own values and traditions – "our Forest Humour", "in this little Forest of ours", "it's a little country on its own", "once a Forester always a Forester."
> (Potter, 1962, 42)

Potter explains how finely balanced the Forest's distinctive identity is at this point, just past mid-century, with the old and new in tension. He illustrates this through two conversations with young Foresters. The first young person he spoke to grumbled about too little to do, and there being too few decent coffee bars. She then concedes that the Forest has beautiful scenery, and recognises '"being a Forester" as something unusual and, in its way, privileged' (Potter, 1962, 87). In the second conversation, in the final pages of the book, he refers to a young man who plays for the village rugby team, however 'keeps sliding into the past tense when talking of his team or his village' (143). It is this 'sliding into the past tense', that could describe the tone of so much of Forest of Dean literature of the twentieth century.

The Spectral Forest

Winifred Foley's *A Child in the Forest*, and Fred Boughton's *The Forest in My Younger Days*, both looked back to the 1920s, Boughton's suggesting a continuity between then and the nineteenth century Forest of Mountjoy. Leonard Clark's first autobiographies looked back to his childhood at the beginning of the century, the opening chapter of *Green Wood* (1978, Ch1), for example, using the device of finding a Victorian picture album prompting reminiscence of, but also suggestive of a continuity with, his Edwardian childhood and the earlier Victorian age. Just as Bright suggested (above), that the continuities of employment and tradition in the Forest were, by the 1970s, at the point of being broken, so too in Potter's *The Changing Forest.* Ultimately though, Potter concluded, in 1962, there was then some small room for optimism 'that there is much in the Forest of Dean which will not be hammered flat' (Potter, 1962, 143). This was, he suggests, largely down to youngsters' parents who encouraged their children to join the local rugby team, or take up with the village brass band, due to a nostalgia for their own childhoods.

The nature of autobiography is, of course, such that it is largely concerned with the past, and can at times demonstrate a nostalgia for it. Though Foley's and Clark's series would eventually bring their life stories up to more

recent times, the majority of Forest memoirs of this period were based around memories of the beginning of the twentieth century, or, as in the case of Joyce Latham's, the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the older patterns of life in the Forest still evident though. These books, looking to a Forest of the past, spoke to a broader nostalgic yearning amongst their readership. For those authors who had spent time away, such as Potter, Foley, and Clark, there was an especially strong yearning to write about a Forest doubly removed: by time, and by geography. 'Nostalgia is almost inevitable for the place where one grows up', wrote Foley herself in an author's note (Foley, 1977, 4). A dominant theme of Forest of Dean literature of the twentieth century was just such a pre-occupation with the past.

The Forest's literature of this period might be said to be haunted by the past, in much the same way as its physical landscape was, and is, haunted by the spectres of past lives, and past industry written into the landscape. This can be found in Harvey's 'Devil's Chapel'; Beddington's 'Quitchurch Quarry'; Joyce Latham's description of the Forest of her youth, with its 'full of grey slag' (Latham, 1993, 59), referred to above; and Leonard Clark's description of previous lives marked in the landscape, 'old coal mines, seams as waterlogged, As the lungs of those who sweated them' (Clark, 1981b). In Louise Lawrence's *The Dram Road* (1983), there is literal haunting, memories of a dead son appearing as apparitions near an old mine entrance. The history of the Forest of Dean is evident in its very landscape, (remains of former industrial sites, roadways, tram-roads, pitheads, harbours, etc.), and in its continuing cultural traditions (freemining, free roaming sheep, brass bands). Past and present in dialogue, or perhaps present haunted by the past, a spectral presence in the landscape and culture. Harvey sought to explain the present Forest of Dean as a product of its history, (as well as its geography), and Winifred Foley too, in her opening chapter, 'Our Village', in *A Child in the Forest*, a succinct description of the Forest's history as context for the stories that followed, and a way to explain her present too.

This ghostly presence of the past in the Forest's landscape is picked up in Lisa Hill's 2013 paper 'Archaeologies and geographies of the post-industrial

past: Landscape, memory and the spectral'. In her paper, Hill narrates a walk she takes through part of the Forest with local resident and historian Ron Beard. She contextualises her narration of the walk with a summary of developments in the field of memory studies, and in particular the concepts of hauntology, and the spectral. She describes Ron's experience of the landscape as, at once, both in the present, and the past, uncannily haunted by memories of childhood, family and friends, so in turn their experiences too, as well as the physical remains of past industrial activity. Hill's description of such an interaction of past and present, a fluidity, was a theme in much of Dennis Potter's work. It can be seen in *The Singing Detective* (1986), the adult Phillip's memories of his Forest childhood literally haunting him in the present. It is also embodied, in a sense, in the young people Potter has his brief conversations with (above), in *The Changing Forest*, local accents and a love of the Forest's beauty mixed together with a taste for contemporary pop music and modish coffee bars. For Potter, this relationship with the past is not one of a *cosy* nostalgia, wholly concerned with the past, rather:

> Nostalgia puts things safely in the past. What I say and I know we do in our own lives is we know the past is suddenly standing smack in front of us not behind us. It can infiltrate into the very future or the present in ways that don't permit nostalgia. Nostalgia says "Oh those dear dead days, Oh those golden days, Oh how I felt on x-day" which is safely putting it back. Whereas if its jogging alongside you, and nodding at you and grinning at you and pulling at you then suddenly standing jabbering in front of you then you know that you are one piece with what you have been and what you will be. That doesn't permit nostalgia.
> (Potter, 1991)

He spoke about this previously, in an interview with Alan Yentob in 1987, saying that his work is not nostalgic, rather the past is 'running along beside us now', and that unless we have 'an alert awareness of the immediate past', we are 'being complicit in the orthodoxy of the present' (Potter, 1994, 67). The past, then, for Potter, is a resource, a means for examination and questioning of

the present: it offers alternative values and ways of living that might challenge the negative aspects of contemporary, commercialised, consumerist, and individualistic culture. Potter's view that the past is 'jogging alongside you', and contemporary notions of hauntology and the spectral as utilised by Hill, offer a productive, alternative insight into Forest of Dean literature of this period and what appears to be its pre-occupation with the past. Rather than simply considering it as nostalgia, placing it (to reiterate Potter) 'safely in the past', it could instead be preserving a version of the past as a source of alternative ideas for the future.

During this period there were two competing, yet in some sense complimentary, forces at work in shaping Forest of Dean literature. Radio, and then television, acted as an homogenizing force: dominated by a centralized, metropolitan culture, it threatened the communal patterns of life, values and traditions in the Forest. Yet, at the same time the Forest's writers in print, in performance, and through broadcast on those very same mediums, began to disseminate an increasingly refined and shared version of a distinctive Forest of Dean. Their local readers, and audiences, keenly enjoyed work that recognised, understood, and explained the distinctive identity of where they lived and aspects of distinctive Forest culture. The literature of the period shared many ideas, themes and stories, and sometimes drew on ideas about the Forest and Foresters that had their roots in much earlier work. In their efforts to describe and explain the Forest's distinctive identity, (something that they, and perhaps their readers, felt was disappearing), these authors created an alternative vision, contrary to those hegemonic forces at work via a national and increasingly globalized media and culture. Ironically, broadcast media also played a part in furthering these ideas about the Forest too. Potter's hint of optimism in *The Changing Forest*, that the Forest of Dean might resist and retain its identity, can also be read in his final work for television, and this will bring us to nearly the end of the century.

Cold Lazarus (Potter, 1996), was written by Dennis Potter as he was dying from cancer in 1994, and posthumously produced. It was the second of a pair of

linked serials. In this one the cryogenically preserved head of Daniel Feeld, who had died at the end of the previous drama *Karaoke* (Potter, 1996), is brought back to life in a dystopian twenty-fourth century. His memories come to life as pictures and sound on a laboratory screen, as scientists sit fascinated by images of a more humane time in history. Depending on the balance of chemicals used, Daniel's memories from different periods in his life become intermingled, the grown up Daniel appearing in shorts and tank-top in the woods, and outside a chapel behaving like a ten year old[93]. Watching, the scientists discuss the nature of memory, the fluidity of remembering, and how we edit the past in relation to our present. The conversation (Potter, 1996, 252-253) is in part a metaphorical discussion of the nature of writing, and the slippery relationship between actual authorial biography, and what the author does with elements of their own life when they write. As Emma, the lead scientist, says 'They tell *tales*. They make things up' (285). As the scientists' funding faces being cut, a Murdoch-like media mogul offers to fund them in exchange for the rights to screen Daniel's memories to his vast media audiences. Amongst the many other issues Potter is exploring in this, his final drama, are those noted above in regard to the status, value, and uses of the past: For media-mogul Siltz, the past is mere entertainment, in effect, nostalgia. One of the scientists, however, who is also secretly a member of the RON resistance network, sees how these scenes from the past might be very differently deployed to different effect. Audiences will marvel at being able to see the reality of the past:

> and then they might look at the world around them, the world as it is *now*, and start to ask questions! *Why* do we have to live like this? *Why* cannot *we* walk the streets? Why can't we mingle and touch and hope in the way our forefathers and mothers use to do? Why? Why? Why? (Potter, 1996, 307)

[93] There are intertextual temporal layers at work here too, one of Potter's early television plays *Stand Up Nigel Barton (1965),* featured adults dressed and acting as children, also in *Blue Remembered Hills (1979).* As is often the case, there are elements drawn from Potter's own biography in Daniel and his memories.

The productive, progressive potential of the past, is then, quite different from that of a safe nostalgia. It is indeed a vision of different values and different ways of living that might inspire us to question the social reality of our present day: it is a source of inspiration.

Forest of Dean Literature in the Twentieth Century

As has been demonstrated, this highly productive period of Forest of Dean literature during the 1970s and 1980s can ultimately be traced back to the earlier part of the century; in the work of Harvey in the 1920s and 1930s; then Beddington's dramas in the 1940s and 1950s; and Foley's literary aspirations and attempts to be heard from the 1950s onwards. In the 1970s Forest of Dean literature received new impetus with Doug McLean as publisher and retailer, but this was drawing on what was already a strong literary culture in the Forest with support from the local newspaper, self-publication, and a lively social scene of clubs, smoking concerts and amateur drama. Through the research work for this chapter of the thesis, now the Forest of Dean literature of the 1970s and 1980s can be better understood for what it really was. It was not a momentary flowering of rural, working-class, naïve voices (though these were present) simply responding to current literary fashions (though these contributed to it being of interest to a wider, regional and national readership). This period was instead a time in which Forest writers who had already been writing and developing their work for decades had simply gained wider attention. This is exemplified by Foley, a writer who has until now been miscast as someone with no literary aspirations who was launched into writing only because of the BBC. Important as their role was in getting her published in 1974, as has been revealed she was desperate to write and be heard long before then. My research demands a reshaping of that narrative: Foley was already an author waiting for a break to get her work published. Harry Beddington too, remembered locally for his final publication *Forest Humour*, was in reality a prolific writer who first developed his skills in writing and performing drama. Beddington was unique as a writer skilled in, and dedicated to, writing in Forest dialect, not just for humour

but to discuss serious issues of the day. Harvey, Gloucestershire's laureate, must now be understood as a Forest author too, a vital contributor to Forest of Dean literature and in particular to the twentieth century's ever more refined conception of a distinctive Forest of Dean.

The outpouring of Forest of Dean literature of the 1970s and 1980s shares an increasingly focused common interest: at the moment of maximum threat (the drivers for change identified by Potter), the idea of the Forest of Dean as a distinctive place and culture is written about and, as a result, is strengthened through its literature. As the markers of a distinctive Forest of Dean were in decline (mining, heavy industry, the use of dialect) Forest of Dean literature became less tied to contemporary material reality. Forest of Dean literature's depiction of the Forest's identity and culture takes on a more nostalgic, mythic status. As Potter put it in his last interview:

> It's a sort of mythic Forest of Dean. There's the real one (laughs), with the same signs and stresses as the real anywhere, and there's the other one…the one I grew up as a small child in, and those rather ugly villages in beautiful landscape. Just accidentally a heart-shaped place between two rivers.
> (Potter, 1994, 6)

This mythic Forest, increasingly based on the past, serves, however, an important material function. Looking to the past and detached it might be, but this mythic Forest in literature in turn feeds back into the culture and thus actual social reality of the Forest of Dean. The very same year that the *Forest Talk*, album was released, 1981, the Dean Heritage Museum Trust[94], (formed in 1979), acquired the semi-derelict Camp Mill site and building in Soudley, the site where, in 1983, the Dean Heritage Centre was opened (Dean Heritage Centre, 2011). Forest of Dean culture and identity has been influenced by notions of distinctiveness identified, rehearsed and celebrated in its literature. Stuart Laing argues, in regard to images of rural popular culture, that this is a 'construction

[94] A key figure in its conception and foundation, (and in creating its oral history archive), was Harry and Mildred Beddington's friend Elsie Olivey.

of meaning through language and symbol, through the available stories and images circulating within their culture,' (Laing, 1992, 133): This is just so with Forest of Dean literature. With much of Forest of Dean literature's mix of history, and personal and folkloric memory, it facilitates a 'knowledge that creeps in sideways', as Raphael Samuel put it, in which, much like his description of oral history, 'memory and myth intermingle, and the imaginary rubs shoulders with the real' (Samuel, 1994,5-6). This can be clearly seen in the example of the killing of the bears story, and many of the other shared anecdotes, and ideas about the Forest and Foresters. The effect of this re-/circulation of ideas of a distinctive Forest identity and culture has been one which can be traced in the continuation, against the odds, of several aspects of Forest of Dean culture: mining as a significant economic activity is gone, yet mining persists to this day as small scale free mining, its participants engaged in it as an economic activity, but also a cultural practice, a signifier of identity; the number of brass and silver bands has reduced, yet bands survive, compete, and commission new work; the economic value in sheep has declined, yet efforts to maintain the tradition of free-roaming sheep persists; independence, rebellion and defence of ancient rights no longer manifest in riot, but instead resurface in the Hands Off Our Forest campaign successfully resisting Government sell off of the national forest estate; and self-sufficiency and self-reliance might be seen evident in the higher than national and regional numbers of self-employed in the Forest (Nomis official labour market statistics, 2016).

The Forest of Dean literature of the twentieth century became then a repository of a series of alternative conceptions of self and culture that are distinctive and locally rooted, (Foresters as distinctive, robustly independent, self-sufficient, communistic), offering a point of resistance to those very homogenising forces Potter had described. Through the broadcasts of Harvey, and later Winifred Foley's *A Child in the Forest* (first on radio then on television) depictions of a distinctive Forest of Dean reached an ever wider audience, ironically using the very means that had been considered to be a threat to distinctive regional cultures. Increasingly refined as these conceptions of the

Forest were in Forest of Dean literature of the period, mostly drawn on a deep connection between its authors and the Forest, they also sometimes reflected ideas of the Forest rooted in the distant past, as far back as the early-modern writers' ideas about forests in general. These shared ideas, and indeed sometimes shared stories, make the case for the recognition of Forest of Dean literature as a distinctive body of literary works.

This chapter and the preceding two have begun to reveal the history of Forest of Dean literature, and the source of some of its conceptions of the Forest and its inhabitants in antecedent works. There is more work to be done in uncovering, sharing and analysing this history so this thesis is only the start of this scholarship. The following chapters of this thesis will begin to open up this literature to some deeper analysis as it seeks to uncover some persistent and common themes and content, placing these too in historical context, informed too by the histories in the preceding chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 4.

The Isolated Forest

"Ye are Satan and his helpers come from the world
outside the Great Forest of which we know nought".
(Wood, 1965, 104)

[T]he Forest of Dean was remote and self-contained.
We were cut off from the world.
(Foley, 1974, 13)

By geography, history, and habit, the Forest of
Dean is a separate State.
(Harvey, 1935, part 2)

Literary descriptions of the Forest make much of its past and present geographical isolation. A striking contemporary example, albeit not a literary one, demonstrating the currency of this idea can be found on the website for Forestry England's Foresters' Forest landscape partnership programme where it describes the Forest of Dean as 'A land on the edge, isolated and bypassed' (Foresters' Forest, 2018). Harry Beddington, writing in the 1960s, said the Forest had been 'isolated for generations' (1961, 2), to the extent that 'There yunt many people outside the Vorest as da knaw where 'tis' (3). He also wrote that the people who lived here were 'a race apart' (64). Forest of Dean farmer Mr Ardblaster, in John Moore's novel *The White Sparrow* (1954), said that the Forest people 'kept themselves to themselves and had little truck with strangers' (34). W. H. Potts described the Forest as a 'silent, secret place', that was 'severed from the surrounding country' (Potts, 1949, 145). For Winifred Foley, looking back to her childhood in the 1920s 'the Forest of Dean was remote and self-contained. We were cut off from the world' (Foley, 1974, 13). Ivor H. Davis,

similarly remembering the very beginning of the twentieth century, writes that the Forest was 'in many ways more isolated than most other parts of the country' (Davis, 1996, 5). Dennis Potter, whilst too making the case for the Forest's isolation, slightly qualified it, writing that it was 'relatively isolated' (Potter, 1960, 41). F. W. Harvey, on BBC radio in 1935 had said, unequivocally, that 'Geographically, the Foresters are isolated. They have been isolated for centuries. They are only just ceasing to be' (Harvey, 1935, part 2).

This motif of the Forest of Dean as 'isolated and bypassed', and 'remote and self-contained', is a recurrent one, and appears in many descriptions and depictions of the Forest[95], however, the Forest has not universally throughout history been described in this way. The Forest has not always been described as isolated, and even when it is, this is often qualified, or even stated then effectively contradicted in the body of the work as it sets out to describe the Forest's extensive connections with the wider world. This chapter interrogates the notion of the isolated Forest of Dean and suggests that, throughout much of its history, the Forest was far from isolated. The chapter will trace, what will be shown to be, the relatively recent invention of the Forest as isolated and explain why this myth came to be deployed in Forest of Dean literature.

Not Quite So Isolated

It could be assumed reading, some of the twentieth-century accounts of the Forest as 'cut off from the world', as Foley remembered it to be during her childhood in the 1920s, that the further back one looked for descriptions of the Forest, the ever more isolated it would become, and that within a few decades back into history it would recede into almost utter obscurity. The reality is a little less straightforward: the isolated Forest is often, it seems, tantalisingly just out of reach, and if ever isolated at all, it was so in the past, never in the present, never at the time of writing.

[95] A phrase used by Rudder in his description of the Forest in 1779 (as referred to in Chapter One of this thesis).

For Camden, writing in the sixteenth century, the hidden Forest 'so very dark and terrible' (Gibson, 1722, 269), was already becoming a thing of the past, the discovery of iron leading to a depletion of its woodland cover. Drayton, writing a quarter of a century later, whilst reinforcing the once barbarous nature of the Forest's inhabitants as satyres running off to their 'gloomie secret shades' (Drayton, 1612, lines 29-42), describes this hidden Forest similarly, as in the past tense. Early-modern writing such as this about the Forest of Dean drew on generic conceptions of forests dating back to classical mythology, and as Keith Thomas points out, up until the mid-seventeenth century forests were still expected to be utilised in poetry as '"unpeopled"' places (Poole, 1657 cited in Thomas, 1984, 283-6). These portayals of the Forest are drawing on this tradition, but also acknowledging that the exploitation of its ever more valued resources has begun to open it up, revealing it to the eye of the writer, poet, traveller. By 1634 it was being described as the 'famousest', forest in England (Whickham Legg, 1904, 84), and in the 1780s it was described as 'A Place of Fame' (Byng, 1781, cited in Phelps, 1982, p9). William Cobbett, travelling through the Forest in the 1820's, giving it only a brief mention in his writing, does not describe the Forest as isolated or cut off in any way, instead choosing to simply comment on the healthy state of the local labouring classes resulting from their ability to freely graze their animals on the fringes of the Forest (Cobbett, 1966, 29).

For Catherine Drew, in the first half of the nineteenth century, and for the Reverend H. G. Nicholls a decade or so later, the Forest was not an especially isolated place either. Drew admits that, growing up she 'Knew nothing of town, of what did it mean' (Drew, 1841, 15), but this was not due, as far as she was concerned, to the Forest being particularly isolated, rather instead because 'I prefer it to either city or town' (15). In another of her poems she herself uses the phrase 'The Forest of Dean is a place of great fame' (28). Nowhere in her extant poetry, neither in regard to her description of the contemporary Forest nor in its past, does she describe the Forest as in any particular way cut off from the mainstream of historical developments and national life. Nicholls wrote that

the Forest was ‘one of the most interesting and remarkable localities in the kingdom’ (1858, v), but even when, in his later work of 1863, he describes it as ‘so isolated’ (172) by the rivers Severn and Wye on either side, he qualifies this within a few lines, saying that:

> On the other hand, its having adjoined the southern termination of the boundary line between England and Wales, across which hordes of marauders or else bands of organized troops would be apt to pass, if they indeed did not make it a battle field may have tended to qualify this exclusive status.
> (Nicholls, 1863, 172)

Evidence of people passing through the Forest of Dean in this way can, in reality, be traced back to the hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic period of 8000-6000 BC, and extensive Neolithic finds across the Forest suggest there may have been settled communities as early as 4000-2000 BC (Walters, 1992). Bryan Walters goes on to describe how, following the Roman invasion, roads were constructed crossing the Forest from as early as the first century AD, and that by the second century the trade in iron mined and manufactured in the Forest, was making a significant contribution to the Roman economy. The Roman roads linked the Forest directly to the large garrison towns of Gloucester, and those in Herefordshire, and South Wales. Cyril Hart, writing in 1967, believed coal found to have been used during the Roman period at sites in the Cotswolds, had likely been mined in and transported from the Forest. High status buildings, such as the villa and temple complex at Lydney, were at several other locations across the Forest of Dean (Hart, 1967; Walters, 1992; Sindrey, 1990), clearly indicating that the area was subject to the same cultural influences of the empire as any other area in Britain under Roman rule. In the period following the departure of the Roman legions people continued to live, work and trade in the area, and it was also of interest to the invading Saxons and Danes. King Offa’s dyke marked the border, and as such the crossing point for trade between Wales and the English, and along with the Wye this marked out the Western edge of the Forest. Hart describes extensive trade and industry in the Forest in the period before

the Norman invasion, including production and regional export of salt, iron, fish, and honey (Hart, 2000). Iron mining, production, and export, continued, with direct links to near-by Gloucester at the time of the Norman invasion, the Forest being England's leading iron producer until at least the fourteenth century, and iron buyers from Bristol, for example, recorded in the Forest in 1270 (Jurica, 1996d, 339). Though intermittently suppressed due to concerns over industry's impact on the Forest's timber reserves, the region remained an important iron producer until well into the nineteenth century when coal would become an even more significant export from the Forest.

The Forest of Dean was then perhaps *never* as isolated as later literary presentations of the region would have it. Indeed, with trading links via the rivers Severn and Wye, the very same two rivers that are so often presented as the means of its isolation, the Forest was arguably very well connected. Not only were the rivers relatively easily crossed by ferries, several working on the Severn (Herbert, 1985, Ch7), such as the one at Newnham-On-Severn noted by Daniel Defoe (1748, 321), they also facilitated effective transportation of its extracted resources and manufactured goods. As early as 1677, for example, it was estimated that 60,000 people were reliant for their livelihoods on the production and utilisation of Forest of Dean iron, with it being sent as far afield as Staffordshire (Yarranton, 1677 cited in Nicholls, 1858, 222). Nicholls himself links the Forest's renown to its iron:

> If there be one circumstance more than another that has conferred celebrity on the Forest of Dean, it is the remote origin, perception, and invariably high repute of its iron works.
> (Nicholls, 1866, 1)

As the easiest means of transporting goods for trade the rivers Severn and Wye were in effect superhighways, this possibly being the case as far back as pre-history. Certainly, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were an essential means of exporting the Forest's ever important productions of iron, timber, and coal. There were numerous small harbours along the Severn at

Gatcombe, Purton, and Lydney (Hart, 1971b, 393), some of these noted in more basic form as far back as 1282 (Hart, 1987, 52-53). There was also ship-building, a ship of four hundred tons for example launched at Newnham-On-Severn in 1776 (*Gloucester Journal,* cited in Woods, 1962, 43). There was the export of glass manufactured in the Forest, an industry set up by Huguenot[96] emigres (Penn, 1983), tree bark sent to Ireland, and the importation of wine. Similarly, the settlements on the river Wye, such as at Redbrook and Brockweir, were connected to the busy port of Chepstow and trading (both import and export) with Bristol from at least the early seventeenth century onwards (Herbet, 1996, 90 & 220). William Gilpin, travelling down the Wye in 1770, described at Lydbrook 'a large wharf, where coals are shipped for Hereford and other places' (Gilpin, 1782, 34). The now quiet village of Brockweir, on the Wye, is said to have been 'a notoriously rowdy place full of dockers, sailors and bargemen' (Overlooking the Wye), from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and such were the Forest's connections with marine trade that there were at one time over a dozen sailors living in the village of Hewesfield (Sandall, 2013, 94).

These connections with international trade routes via the two rivers also brought people from far afield to the Forest too, with records of individuals from the West Indies, Africa (including some slaves and former slaves), India and the Middle East from the late seventeenth century onwards in the Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire Records Office). As well as comings and goings due to trading, industrial work itself also drew people to the region, in the sixteenth century for example German iron miners were said to have been in the Forest (Nicholls, 1866, 27; Hart, 1966, 83).

Simon Sandall makes a convincing argument that, alongside ever increasing work available in mining, quarrying, and manufacturing from the late seventeenth century onwards, another draw for people to work and settle in the Forest was access to common grazing on the Forest's fringes and wastes (Sandall, 2013, 94), as alluded to above by Cobbett. Sandall points to the prevalence of Welsh surnames in the Forest's Mine Law Court of the period as

[96] The basis of James Playsted Wood's 1965 novel *The Golden Swan.*

evidence for the migratory flow across the border (90). People came into the area in search of work, to exploit resources, and to take advantage of opportunities to squat, and graze their animals. Equally, in times of hardship there would be migratory flows out of the Forest in search of work, descendants returning a generation later, picking up family connections to resettle in the Forest. The Forest population was far more mixed in regard to its geographical origins than might be mistakenly assumed by Beddngton's 'race apart', line.

The Forest of Dean's importance in regard to iron extraction and smelting was matched by its recognition as a vital store house of naval timber. Samuel Pepys, as an official for the Navy Board, refers in his diaries to letters he received reporting the destruction by a storm of a thousand or so trees in the Forest of Dean; then later that year, and again in 1667, he records meetings with Sir John Winter[97] of Lydney regarding timber supply from the Forest of Dean (Phelps, 1982, 13). The conflict between the maintenance of its woods for potential shipbuilding, and the need to fell trees for the manufacture of charcoal needed in iron smelting, brought the Forest repeatedly to the attention of the government, this added to by the fact that the sale of wood for charcoal was itself a source of revenue for the crown (Hart, 1995, 52). The tensions between the Forest's national importance to the Navy, and its growing contribution to the economy from its industrial production, would ensure it was the subject of much government attention. In addition, the rights and privileges of its local inhabitants regarding mineral extraction, timber, and grazing, lead to frequent clashes between the different interests in the Forest, and this sometimes manifested as riot, and the destruction of enclosures and property (Sharp, 2010; Anstis, 1986). All of this contributed to the Forest of Dean's fame or notoriety, and led to a series of government enquiries and commissions into the management of the Forest, from the seventeenth century onwards (Hart, 1995). The Forest was clearly a place of interest and economic importance to the government in the capital. As far as broader cultural connections were

[97] Alternative spelling Wyntour

concerned, certainly for people of economic means in the Forest of Dean, the region was far from being as isolated as might be assumed.

Though geographically far from the centre of London's eighteenth-century literary circles, the Forest of Dean was known and visited by such renowned figures as the poet Alexander Pope; playwright and founder of *The Tatler,* Richard Steele; and Joseph Addison, writer, and co-founder (with Steele) of *The Spectator.* All three were friends and admirers of Catharina Boevey[98], owner of Flaxley Abbey (Anstis, 1996, 89-93; Nicholls, 1863, 39-45). Catharina[99], a wealthy young widow, spent her winters in London, returning to Flaxley each spring. She was mentioned regularly by Steele in *The Spectator*, and he dedicated his second volume of *The Ladies Library,* to her in 1714 (Nicholls, 1863, 40). Nicholls himself writes that both Steele and Addison are said to have visited her at the abbey, and likely Pope too according to Ralph Anstis who says Pope would have stopped there on route between Bath and Hereford (Anstis, 1996, 102). She came to the attention of London literary circles for her 'intelligence, wide reading, and good conversation' (Munns and Richards, 2010, 106), as well as, no doubt, for her considerable fortune.

Travel to and from the Forest by road was, it seems, relatively unremarkable. Though a more extensive expansion and improvement of the roads system was to await the formation of Turnpike Trusts in the middle of the eighteenth century, main routes across the Forest had already seen some improvement to aid the export of the area's industrial output (Smith & Ralph, 1972, 93). In Daniel Defoe's description of Newnham-on-Severn, first published in 1722, possibly based on his travels through the West Country in 1705 (Furbank and Owens, 1991, viii), he mentions that there is 'a spacious Road running Westward, and lately repaired at the Expence [sic] of His majesty', and that it 'leads from the Town to the Forest' (Defoe, 1748, 321). By 1762, The White Hart Inn at Coleford, in the very centre of the Forest of Dean being advertised for

[98] Alternative spelling Bovey

[99] She was benefactress to the county's clergy, founder (in effect) of the first Sunday-school, contributor to a range of charities, and later helped to found the Three Choirs Festival (Anstis, 1996, 89-93)

lease, was able to boast that it was 'situate on the great Roads from London to South Wales, and from Bristol to Hereford' (*Gloucester Journal*, 22nd November 1762 cited in Herbert, 1985, 27). These examples suggest a Forest that was well connected by road with the rest of the country.

Boevey and her literary friends' relative geographical mobility suggest that, in the Forest, they were far from isolated from contemporary literary and cultural developments. In 1722, the *Gloucester Journal* was launched (Llanman-Clark, 1956), and it was widely distributed in the county (Herbert, 1985, vi). Munns and Richards (2010), suggest too, that from as early as the 1680's onwards the nearby city of Gloucester was becoming a lively social centre for the local gentry, and that by 1718 boasted 'a scientific society, lectures and exhibitions, and a musical club' (111). Flaxley Abbey itself, a private home following the dissolution of the monasteries, had gardens laid out in the then fashionable Dutch style (Curriw and Herbert eds., 1996, plate 6), as did near-by Westbury Court. Other large houses in the Forest of Dean included the Hall family's Highmeadow House near Coleford, and the Wyntours' home at Lydney, as well as other significant houses at Clearwell, Littledean and Newland (Currie and Herbert eds., 1996). Catharina was herself friends with the Colchesters at Westbury Court, had business dealings with Lady Wyntour (in connection with the running of their respective iron forges), and seems likely to have had contact with John Kyrle of Ross-on-Wye, (celebrated by Pope in his poem as 'Man of Ross'). There was during this period then a network of local gentry in and around the Forest of Dean aware of, connected to, and participating in the mainstreams of social and cultural life of the period. Many of them were engaged, as was Catharina, in the business of iron production, timber, charcoal, small-scale farming and the trade relationships with people further afield that these necessitated. The Forest during this period was not the completely isolated backwater that later literary depictions of it describe.

By the time that Catherine Drew was writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, the region was of ever increasing interest to capitalists seeking to further, and more effectively, exploit the Forest's mineral resources.

She mention's local industrialist Protheroe's rail-roads that were part of what was becoming an extensive network of horse-drawn tram roads that crossed the Forest, taking its coal, stone and iron to both rivers Severn and Wye for shipment. Cinderford, where Catherine lived, was just one of the settlements rapidly expanding, people from outside the Forest drawn to work in the coke-fired iron furnace built by the Teagues (Anstis, 1990, Ch3), as well as the iron mines and coal mines in the area. By the time Nicholls was publishing his first work in 1858, there were steam trains running between Gloucester and Chepstow, with access to the Forest via Lydney station which had opened in 1851 (Paar, 1965, 45), and in the following decades steam services would replace, or add to, the old tram road networks, linking the rest of the Forest into the expanding national rail network.

There are several examples of Forest of Dean literature in the later nineteenth century reflecting the connectedness of the Forest with the wider world. Charles Grindrod's *Tales in the Speech House* (1886), for example, features stories told by different characters who had been travelling through the region, (a clergyman, a lawyer, a commercial traveller). Grindrod describes the distinctive characteristics of the Foresters, and the beauty of the woods, the Speech House itself 'surrounded on all sides by forest, with no other habitation in sight' (Grindrod, 1886, 282), but also acknowledges that this view is deceptive, as:

> [I]n strange contrast to the stillness, come sounds of wheel and hammer and engine; and strange open spaces where you least fancied them, full of noise and bustle break upon your view
> (Grindrod, 1886, 4)

In addition to the industrial activity, Grindrod also later describes the railway running along the length of the valley below (284), and refers to the Roman roads still in use through the Forest. Though the very premise of the book is that of isolation, the travellers stranded in the Speech House with nothing else to do each evening than tell their tales, they are only stranded because of an

exceptional snow fall. Snow becomes the device for stranding his travellers, the Forest thus afforded a temporary liminal quality, a specially separate place in which the normal flow of busy-ness and time itself is suspended, allowing his travellers to indulge in the rituals of their story telling. Once the thaw comes, his travellers depart, the daily business in and out of the Forest, and its busy industry and trade, resumed. The Forest, apart from this magical snow-bound interlude, is normally a place of industry, business, travel and connection.

Just over a decade after Grindrod's book, Tom Bevan's 1899 novel *The Thane of the Dean,* opens with a journey to Gloucester from the Forest at the time of William the Conqueror. The two Wulf brothers had indeed just 'emerged from the darkness of the thick Forest'[100] (9), but their trip to the city is unremarkable, and the family they stay with in Gloucester also happened to be, unremarkably, 'Forest bred, and both were in a way connected with the house of Wulf' (25), in the Forest. John is a smith, and will be making a sword from Forest steel, its iron having come from the Wulf family's own mines. When the boys are delayed in the city, messages are dispatched to the Forest, communications between Forest and city nothing unusual. In Bevan's later Forest novel, *Sea Dogs All!* (1911), the Forest is at the centre of national history, as Spanish agents plot to burn its woods[101], their aim being to destroy this important naval shipbuilding resource. Both Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake are in the Forest, attending to timber and shipbuilding on the banks of the Severn. The action sees the hero of the story, after defeating the Spanish plot, travel to London, and he later sails to South America. In Bevan's depiction of the Forest it is connected to the major currents of history, and ultimately, global travel and exploration.

Similar connections with the wider world can be found in the work of S. M. Crawley-Boevey. Descendant of Catharina Boevey (mentioned above), and resident of Flaxley Abbey, Sybella Mary Crawley-Boevey's two volumes of *Dene Forest Sketches* (1887 and 1899), are a collection of stories drawing heavily on

[100] An example of the inheritance from early-modern descriptions of the Forest (see Chapter One of this thesis).
[101] The Armada plot first mentioned by Camden in 1586 (see Chapter One of ths thesis).

letters and other family documents held at the abbey. Set during various periods, from the twelfth century onwards, the stories are connected to the main currents of English history, isolation of the Forest never mentioned, nor especially inferred. Her story 'Timely Legacies'[102] (1899, 237-297), set in the 1750s, is one of two of her stories acknowledging connections between Forest residents and the sugar plantations of the West Indies and its connection with the slave trade. Once again, like Bevan's seafaring tale, this is the Forest tied into the British imperial system, not isolated from it.

The first guide to visiting the Forest of Dean was produced in the same period, John Bellows' *A Week's Holiday in the Forest of Dean,* being first published in the early 1880s. The introduction describes the Forest as having 'been to the majority of Englishmen an unknown land' (Standing, 2013, ii), also saying that the reasons for this would be explained later in the book, though in reality they are not. Actually, according to the book, access to the Forest for the traveller of the time is straightforward, Bellow's recommending coming from Gloucester by train into Lydney over the then Severn rail bridge. Similarly, three decades later, in another travel guide, Arthur O. Cooke's *The Forest of Dean* (1913), the author's journey is into the heart of the Forest by train, and it was perfectly straightforward enough via Lydney and Parkend directly to Coleford. Cooke describes the Forest as a place of interest, industry, flora and fauna, but never as isolated. This is also the case with F. W. Baty's *The Forest of Dean* (1952). His entry to the Forest was by car, a straightforward crossing of the Severn at Gloucester. Baty wrote that the Forest was 'unique in many ways' (1), mining country, and a Royal forest, but it is never described as isolated. Neither was it in the early Forest Park guides. In the *National Forest Park Guides: Forest of Dean* (1947), for example, there is no mention of, or inference that, the Forest is isolated. Less than a decade later however, the *Forestry Commission Guide: Dean Forest & Wye Valley* (1956), states that in the Forest of Dean could be found preserved 'a pattern of life and land use', that differed from the rest of

[102] The story featuring an African slave wearing a silver collar, his sister, an illegitimate child and a mysterious death, may have in-part helped to inspire Harry Beddington's play *Limbo.*

Gloucestershire and its neighbouring counties, because of its 'isolation by two great tidal rivers' (Edlin ed., 1956, vii). Here then are the rivers as borders, delineating the Forest's boundaries, barriers rather than connective trade and transport routes. The very same wording is repeated in subsequent Forestry Commission guides up until at least 1974, and possibly later, most likely acting as the source of Forestry England's description of the isolated Forest on the website mentioned above. This marks a distinctive shift in the presentation of the Forest by the Forestry Commission. With more car ownership and increased tourism generally, an area presented as isolated and a preserved gem, could be of more interest and value to visitors.

The Isolated Forest

In *My Friends the Foresters,* in 1935, F. W. Harvey had described the Foresters as having been 'isolated for centuries' but that this was beginning to change, 'By the arrival of mechanical transport which takes them from one place to another within the Forest, and to places outside it' (Harvey, 1935, Part Two). Isolation is becoming something of the past, and in his contribution a few years later to the BBC radio programme *The Forest of Dean: England's First National Forest Park?* (BBC, 1939), he seems to hold both isolation and accessibility in tension, describing it thus:

> [F]ar from the crowd of cities – in a remote, but easily accessible triangle of woodland tucked shyly and safely away in the arms of Shinning Severn and Wandering Wye.
> (BBC, 1939)

Harvey's Forest in 1939 then is not so much isolated as not known about, or not visited, lying ready as an unspoiled virgin territory for the visitor. A. Dorothy Holmes, writing in 1939 (though due to war restrictions not published until 1945), described the Forest of Dean as 'an unopened book', the area being 'unknown territory', to a large proportion of people, but on the same page

points out that it is 'quite easy of access to the majority of people' (Holmes, 1945, 11). Both of these writers suggest that the Forest is not known about by most people rather than necessarily cut off for any material reason or practical purposes. The Forest of Dean had in reality, only a decade before, been the centre of significant, if brief, national media attention. As John Carter Wood (2012), details in *The Most Remarkable Woman in England*, the arrest and trial of Beatrice Pace, a local woman suspected of murdering her husband by poisoning with sheep dip, was a newspaper sensation in 1928. Such was the interest in the case that charabancs were re-routing to the Forest to take in a view of the family home near Coleford, a newspaper reporting that 'hundreds of cars line the road' (*World's Pictorial News,* cited in Wood, 2012, 226). This is just the sort of intense level of tourism that Harvey and Holmes, and the later Forest of Dean Forest Park guidebooks, were seeking to differentiate the Forest of Dean from. There is a clue to this effect in Holmes' preface to her book:

> In these days of congested roads and over-crowded seaside resorts, the unpleasant features of which are bound to increase with the multiplication of "holidays with pay", a less well-known setting for an enjoyable change seems indicated.
> (Holmes, 1945, 11)

From the point of view of encouraging visitors then, the Forest must be presented as easily accessible (who would want to visit a place that was difficult to get to?), but not widely known about (who wants to go where everyone is going?), a hidden gem ready to be discovered. C. J. Vereker, owner of Clearwell Castle, in his foreword to Holmes' book, helpfully points out too, that the district 'is well placed for sightseeing either on foot or by car' (5). This is a Forest easy to get to and easy to travel around.

The Forest in reality, of course, was never really isolated, and was probably as known to people outside it as any other rural area of Britain. Nevertheless, whilst the depiction of it as isolated, or not commonly known about, is not universal found in Forest of Dean literature, it has become a motif that regularly

appears, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Often it is deployed in contradiction to the rest of a book's content. Walters for example, shows how the Forest's archaeological remains demonstrate trade routes dating back at least five thousand years (Walters, 1992, 30), and how this continued through the Roman and later periods, up to the time of the Norman conquest (the period covered by his book). Yet, in a section seeking to establish which tribe of Britons occupied the Forest, he describes how they were isolated from the near-by Silure and Dubunni tribes. He states that 'The people, left alone, are self-sufficient and surely always were', and that 'The insulation of the indigenous population is well attested from medieval times'. Not only this, but he says this is still the case today 'True Foresters are still a people apart' (61). In contradiction to the dominant narrative of his book, he feels the need to separate off the Forest population. The myth of the isolated Forest, in contradiction to so much history and experience, becomes stubbornly persistent, and the remainder of this chapter suggests why this is.

The Forest in Decline

Whilst the Forest's mineral riches and its location between two arterial rivers ensured steady economic development, this was kept in check by its status as royal hunting ground, and later as important source of naval timber. Industrial development was variously tolerated or actively encouraged, but always in negotiation with the statutory nature of the afforested land. The Forest could never become a fully industrialised and urbanised region because of its forest status: it could never become another Sheffield for example. Even so, the region saw steady development throughout the modern period, and improving transport links by river, road and later rail. As the nineteenth century drew to a close however, some of the Forest's industries were actually already in decline. Cinderford's iron furnaces closed in 1894, whilst those at Parkend had already been demolished by 1890 (Hart, 1971b, 129). The first half of the twentieth century saw the closure of tinplate works across the Forest, and the end of iron mining (Hart, 1971b; Bick, 1980). Up to 1945 half of Forest males

were employed in coal (Bick, 1980, 3), but its future by then was already in question. In 1939, A. Dorothy Holmes had noted that coal in the Forest was already 'running short', and that 'some put eighteen years as the term left' (12). Some of the larger pits had started to close by the 1950s, and concern over where the Forest was heading economically was discussed in the letters pages of the local newspaper[103] (*Dean Forest Mercury*, 1959), and by 1965 the last of the big Forest pits had closed. As Potter details in *The Glittering Coffin* (1960), and more extensively in *The Changing Forest* (1962), as does Hart (1971, Ch15), by mid-century the old heavy industries had given way to new light manufacturing. Despite these replacement jobs, it is easy to see how the Forest could have felt to be a place in decline, the crumbled remains of its industrial past all too evident in the landscape, mass employment in coal and heavy industries (and the sense of communal identity this had engendered) replaced by a dispersed workforce across a range of different light manufacturing plants. Cyril Hart's *Industrial History of Dean*, was published in 1971 and the scale, variety, and significance of the Forest's industrial developments over hundreds of years that it described was, by the time it was published, largely in the past: the book was in effect a memorial to an old industrial Forest of Dean. In 1980, when Dave Bick published his *The Old Industries of Dean*, he captured the sense of loss and change that the Forest had undergone:

> Within living memory there has been a revolution of change in the Forest of Dean. The district was for long the site of heavy industry culminating a century ago in numerous large collieries, iron mines, stone, iron and tinplate works as well as many lesser activities. Practically all this has now gone.
> (Bick, 1980, dust jacket)

[103] Whilst BBC trainee Dennis Potter was on attachment with *Panorama* the programme came to the Forest to report on the declining coal industry here. The Executive Committee of the Development Association of the Royal Forest of Dean were unhappy at the programme's portrayal of an 'unnecessarily gloomy picture' (*Dean Forest Mercury*, 1959a). There were letters the following week supporting the programme's analysis, and concern expressed for the future.

As for the Forest's connections during this period, though connections by road would improve with the Severn road bridge opening in 1966, the disaster at Purton in 1960 that brought the old railway bridge down (Jordan, 1977; Witts, 2002), had seen the severing of the Forest's direct rail link with communities on the eastern side of the Severn[104]. That event marked a dramatic, symbolic (if accidental) end to a process that had been underway for some time in regard to rail links. The Forest's passenger rail services had been in steady decline since the end of the 1920s, with most lines closed even before Beeching's reports and the rail network cuts that followed them (Harding, n.d., 6-7; Handley and Dingwall, 1982, 31-39). *Communal* rail travel was being replaced by the *private* car, and Ivor Davies points precisely to car ownership as having the biggest impact on life in his home village of St Briavels. Davies describes how people used their cars to travel to the nearest large towns to do their shopping. This meant that the village shops (amongst those in the small village of St Briavels were shoe shops, department stores and blacksmiths) began to close, Davies writing that this process was almost complete by the 1950s (Davies, 1996, 65). Again, the sight of these closed shops would have suggested a village and region in decline (despite in reality, easier access to the infrastructure and services available in the nearest Forest towns).

As the Forest reached the full extent of its industrial development, then slipped into relative economic decline, it would have been hard for writers to see the region as anything other than becoming left behind and isolated. The destruction of the old Severn rail bridge, and the construction of the iconic new road bridge, both symbolically emphasised the role of the River Severn as obstruction, rather than connective trade route, (the decline in ports on the Forest shore almost complete by this period). With mass employment in mining ending; other heavy industries already part of history, with their physical remains effectively becoming archaeological sites; once thriving railway stations closed and their lines grassing over; radio, and later, television giving a window

[104] Thanks to John Belcher at Dean Heritage Centre for this observation, himself remembering the effect it had on Lydney.

on the world that, by the 1960s, showed rapid social and technological development *elsewhere*; all of this contributed to the Forest starting to feel like a place left behind. It was all too easy to extrapolate from this quieter Forest of Dean into a perpetual past of isolation from the mainstream of British economic and cultural life.

In addition to all of the above, for Winifred Foley there was also comparison between her adolescent and adult life in London, and the memory of growing up in the Forest, a place that almost inevitably would be remembered as isolated and separate by comparison, a child's perception of the world more focused on the immediate, closer social and physical surroundings. To Harvey, and Ivor Davies, both having been overseas in the First World War, the Forest would have appeared an unchanged and sleepy world compared to what they had seen. Regardless of these authors' material experiences, influencing their perceptions and presentations of the Forest at this time, there were arguably other factors at work in writers choosing to describe the Forest as a self-contained and isolated community.

Marking Out the Boundaries of the Forest

Boundaries, whether geographical or social, serve a function in the establishing and maintenance of difference, between that (and those) inside, and that which is outside. It is through this demarcation of difference, inside from outside, of belonging and otherness, that a distinctive identity can be formulated and maintained. Pointing to the work of Russian linguist and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, Hall et al (2013, 225), suggest that his theory of language-meaning as 'dialogic', that is, that meaning comes about through difference, can usefully be applied to the concept of identity. A distinctive identity can, according to this model, only be achieved through identifying difference from another. Applying that model to expression of Forest identity, we see the literary expressions of the Forest as *not* Welsh, the Forest as *not* the same as the agricultural rest of Gloucestershire, as the means by which it is defined.

Moreover, this is not a difference identified and maintained solely by the group itself, by its own expression of differentiation, rather it requires those outside the group to identify this difference too. Hall et al use this model in regard to national or ethnic identity, but applying it here, means that to understand what the Forest is, or what it means to be a Forester, requires depictions and definitions of that from outside as much as inside. It is from the dialogue with these external definitions that identity is shaped. The establishing of otherness, exerted both externally and internally, is therefore an essential element in the maintenance of a distinctive identity. This difference can only be achieved and maintained through the demarcation of boundaries, both territorial and cultural. The use of the image of the isolated, bounded Forest is then part of this process.

The anthropologist Fredrick Barth has written extensively on issues pertaining to boundaries in the study of ethnic, national, and cultural groups. Writing in 1969, he argued that, whilst boundaries can be important in the delineation and differentiation of geographical territories and/or social or ethnic groups, there had at the time been too little interrogation of the concept and working of boundaries. There had been an assumption that boundaries were antagonistically policed, to the exclusion of any inter-territorial or inter-cultural exchange. In his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth ed., 1969), he writes that two findings stand out from the collection of essays that follow. First of these is that group boundaries persist despite them being highly porous; and secondly, that 'cultural identities can persist', despite 'contact and interdependence' (9-10). Applying Barth's ideas to the Forest, its isolation does not then have to be a material fact for the idea of bounded territorial and culture space to persist. The boundaries of the Forest may, in reality, be porous, the Forest may, in reality not be isolated. The Forest's boundaries in this sense are conceptual, rooted in material markers in the landscape and culture, but not absolute in their application. The Forest's isolation is myth, yet no less powerful for that. Writing on boundaries again in 2000 Barth developed his ideas further, suggesting that 'impressing boundaries on the world creates affordances as well

as limitations' (Barth, 2000, 27). Using the image of a fence dividing two amicable neighbours Barth points out that this boundary marker is as much a meeting place for conversation as it is a barrier. Again, applying this idea to the Forest, located as it is on the border with Wales, the border becomes a point of cultural and economic exchange between England and Wales, facilitated in the past by the very boundary of Offa's Dyke. In regard to cultural production, such differentiation through the image of isolation, also affords the opportunity for the production of a distinctive Forest of Dean literature concerned with depicting a distinctive place and culture, though at the same time affording an exchange of these ideas along their conceptual borders. The Forest as distinctive place and identity becomes a point of interest, a point of delineation, a point of cultural exchange.

Descriptions of the Forest of Dean as isolated are, in effect, an expression of the spacial boundaries of the Forest as a distinctive region. Beddington's opening pages of his 1961 *Forest of Dean Humour*, act as kind of manifesto for the Forest of Dean as a separate and distinctive place, possessing a separate identity, distinctive from its surrounding counties, and its Welsh neighbours. With this in mind it deserves taking a moment to examine these few pages of Beddington's in greater detail.

The first page sees one of Beddginton's very few non-dialect poems simply titled 'The Forest of Dean', and it physically locates the Forest between Severn and Wye, and between the distant hills of the Cotswolds in the east and the hills of Wales in the west.

> Where lordly cliffs surrender winsome Wye
> And Severn spreads wide arms to greet his bride
> Greenly uplifted 'gainst the sky
> The Royal Forest reigns in ancient pride.
> Serene in scented airs the west wind brings
> Greeting the sunrise over Cotswolds blue
> Or, westward, fronts the grander slopes of Wales
> While quiet streams and birdsong fills her vales.

> The roystering sou' wester' she curbs with outflung arm
> As strong limbed oaks and beeches take the strain
> Her furious foaming birches froth the wild alarm
> And tall spruce roar in sonorous refrain.
> Clad in green and russet, watchfully at rest,
> Silver-girdled Verderer, Warden of the West.
> (Beddington, 1961, 1)

This beautiful poem is one of location, nature, and landscape, rather than at this stage culture, and it presents an empty stage set, awaiting its human actors (those being Beddington in full-Forester guise and his cast of characters that fill the following pages). This is a landscape of 'quiet streams and birdsong', of 'roystering sou' wester', and 'strong-limbed oaks and beeches'. It is not part of Wales, and is separate from the rural upland of Gloucestershire that is the Cotswolds. Its island-like isolation is reinforced again by describing it as 'Silver-girdled', an allusion to the rivers marking its east and west borders. The very final construction, suggestive of fortress-like landscape and role as Southern extremity of the Welsh Marches and Offa's Dyke, the Forest is 'Warden of the West'.

Page two is Beddington's foreword to the book, and in it he starts with a list of stock character types 'the ironic Scot, the Voluble Welshman', etc. before asking 'What of the Foresters?'. They have been, 'isolated for generations', and 'belonging to neither North nor South, East nor West', the Foresters 'have developed a character of their own, distinctive and recognisable'. He then explains that the rest of the book is written in 'authentic dialect', again this acting to mark its difference, a linguistic boundary. After establishing the Forest's isolated geographical location, this is Beddington developing his theme of cultural distinctiveness. The first page proper of the book, page three, sees in dialect and with some humour, a return to the theme of location, Beddington in character describing his cultural (rather than administrative or political) mind-map of the Forest's boundaries. This is the point in the book when he states that

few people outside of the Forest know where it is. This opening section of the book concludes with a spikey and defensive plea to be left alone:

> Thay wunt interfere wi' nobody if thay be let alone. The best woy ta get on wi' them is ta 'ave nothin' to do wi' um til thay da want tha to. Thay'll zoon let that knaw if thou bist welcome – ar if thou bistn't.[105]
> (Beddington, 1961, 6)

This defensiveness, this exhortation to be left alone, is again a marking of boundaries, a maintenance of difference, that might become also a point of exchange. As if to reinforce the desire to be left alone, the above section of the book is immediately followed by Beddington's take on the bear story, in the poem 'Who killed the Bears?', a tale of violent response to outsiders. Unlike his later work, *Forest Acorns* (1962)*,* that contemplated many issues of the day, the rest of *Forest of Dean Humour,* seeks to depict the distinctiveness of the Forest and Foresters through poems and anecdotes. To complete the task the book ends with a short, untitled dialect poem that includes the lines 'The people of the Vorest o' Dean, Thay be a race apart' (64). Beddington's book is then an exercise in establishing a separate, distinctive Forest, isolated and different from the rest of England, and of course Wales.

In a paper published in 2013, historian Simon Sandall argues that the very notion of the Forest as a separate and distinctive community, has its origins in the specific rights to economic exploitation afforded to the region. Though the paper focuses on the period c.1550-1832, it never the less affords an interpretative insight into the later period explored here. Sandall opens by posing the question 'How does one community demarcate itself from another and how do they relate to personal senses of place?' (Sandall, 2013, 88). He points to the strong sense of local identity in the Forest as being, in part, reactive against the pressures exerted on traditional mining and other common rights

[105] They will not interfere with anybody if they are left alone. The best way to get on with them is to have nothing to do with them until they want you to. They will soon let you know if you are welcome – or if you are not.

during the seventeenth century. These pressures originated from the crown's desire to better manage its forest estates, and private capitalists seeking to gain access to the Forest's mineral resources. Despite often disparate and competing interests amongst people in the Forest, Sandall argues that there was a sufficient sense of communal identification with the interests of the Forest's Freeminers to engender 'pugnacious defence of Forest custom between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries' (97). The industry of mining itself produced economic benefits for the wider community in regard to subsidiary work, such as the sorting and transport of iron and coal, smelting, and charcoal production. Such was local identification with mining that, as noted above (in Chapter Two), the female poet Catherine Drew talked of 'we free miners' (Drew, 1841, 20). Though women were often involved in mining activity and mine ownership, they were not included in the traditional and later statutory rights as Freeminers. Drew is, arguably, instead simply expressing a common sense of identity and common cause with the (male) Freeminers.

Sandall looks at what he describes as three aspects of community: boundaries, social networks, and norms. Of particular relevance here is the marking of the Forest's boundaries. In the Forest there were various customary rights, such as those to common pasture, seasonal grazing, the gathering of wood, and the rights of Freeminers. Such were the wider, shared interests in these various benefits, that there was an economic imperative (as Cobbett in effect had identified, above) towards their maintenance, and thus a wider communal 'antipathy to enclosure and private property' (89). The well-established, and fiercely defended, rights of the Freeminers were seen as a bulwark against attacks on other customary common rights or privileges (grazing etc.) in the Forest. Open to abuse and over exploitation there was a need to police access to the Forest's resources through the marking out of boundaries, both physical and cultural, to the exclusion of 'foreigners' (outsiders). Sandall points to dialect as also part of a process that sought to maintain a strong and exclusive sense of community identity, for a population that was, in reality a

hybrid one (as mentioned above, many early Freeminers likely being of Welsh origin).

Marking out the boundaries of the Forest, separating it from Wales to the west, and the rest of Gloucestershire to the east, was then an important part of maintaining a cohesive community identity in the face of potential intrusion upon, or erosion of, specific economic advantages. In fiction this can be seen expressed in James Playstead Wood's *The Golden Swan* (1965), 'No man may usurp rights granted we Forest men these hundreds of years' (Wood, 1965, 98), declares John Mort at the Miner's Court. In Wood's tale, set during the English Civil War in the Great Forest, (numerous elements make clear this is in fact set in the Forest of Dean), a force of protestant Scotts announce themselves, and these are the 'Satan', from outside the Forest (in the epigraph above). In the face of such external interference, the miners relent in their trial of the émigré Huguenot glass makers, forming an alliance with them by incorporating these fellow industrial craft workers into the Forest community. Mort explains to the Protestant preacher in a strident statement, how the Forest is wholly separate or isolated from current external-world partisan struggles:

> "Whose be the hills of cinders the Romans left and which we use in our smelting? Archbishop Laud's? the Puritans'? they be ours and the Forest be ours and our life in it be ours to be destroyed by none"
> (Wood, 1965, 110)

Whilst the economic advantages of mineral rights and grazing are much diminished, they are still available today, as they were when Harvey, Beddington, Foley, and Wood, were writing. As has been demonstrated, these authors were though writing at a time of change in the Forest, much of the old markers of identity (such as mining and other industrial work) fading into the past. Yet the need for marking out the territory was important as ever, less so for reasons of economic advantage (grazing and mineral rights), instead driven by a desire to retain a distinctive identity whilst some of those very markers such as mining, and dialect, were vanishing or in decline. This is the Forest that is not

Wales, not Gloucestershire, isolated, distinctive, with an identity that can trace it's lineage back to before the Romans. According to Bryan Walters, the people of the Forest were not part of either of the neighbouring tribes (the Silures or Dobunni), and excepting the discovery of future evidence 'the ancient name of the Forest tribe will remain unknown' (Walters, 1992, 61).

The invocation of the isolated Forest becomes then an obligatory literary catechism amongst Forest of Dean literature of the later twentieth century, used to delineate and define the place and community of the Forest. Beddington's introductory pages to *Forest of Dean Humour*, are a beating of the bounds, the whole book a kind of *cultural* Regard of the Forest[106]. Beddington is similarly policing the boundaries and reviewing the condition of the Forest, as are Harvey, Foley, and the other examples cited above: marking off the Forest, separating it, isolating it in the face of physical and cultural erosion and incursions. This separated, isolated Forest is *not* the same as wider rural Gloucestershire, it is *not* farming country; though it is in-part sheep country too this working-class place it is *not* the same as the land-owners' Cotswolds; and though its small mining towns bear uncanny resemblance to the pit-villages of the Welsh valleys and many Forest families have connection to Wales, it is *not* Wales.

The persistence in much (though as we have seen not all) Forest of Dean literature of the Forest as isolated, is an identification and expression of its separateness, of its spatial distinction from its surrounding countryside. The rivers Severn and Wye offer an easy delineation of its eastern and western extremities, their confluence marking its southern border too. Meanwhile the Forest's northern extremities remain flexible, for Harry Beddington marked by the Ross-On-Wye to Grange Court railway line (1961, 3), for other writers simply not worthy of mention. The physical and administrative boundaries of the Forest do some of the work in marking out its space but 'Spaces/places are constructed both materially and discursively' (Allen, Massey and Cochrane et al, 1998, 9), and these literary descriptions and depictions of the Forest are part of that

[106] A regard was the practice that saw knights reviewing the boundaries, incursions, and conditions of the Forest on behalf of the crown (Hart, 1987).

discursive work, marking out a culturally distinctive place as much as a physically separate one.

These writers are also involved in marking out a distinctive literary territory too. Winifred Foley's invocation of an isolated Forest distinguished her work from the other working class and rural memoirs of the period. It enabled F. W. Harvey to write and broadcast about a distinctive place separate from the amorphous rural region of the West, and rural England as a whole. Harry Beddington used the image of the isolated Forest to create a discernable, distinctive place and culture for him to embody in his performances and written dialect voice, a place with a distinctive humour, isolated, not connected to or shared with anyone else. The isolation of the Forest for Ivor H. Davies allowed for the depiction of a distinctive village microcosm, not just any village at the start of the twentieth century.

Forest of Dean literature is an expression of the distinctiveness of the place and people of the Forest: the idea of the isolated Forest plays its part in marking out this physical and discursive territory. This might be seen as reinforcing the Forest's status as a marginal, peripheral place and culture (and by extension its literature too). As will be argued in the next chapter, however, such an assumption would be a mistake, as much of this literature can be better interpreted – indeed much of it expresses within its text - a radical reorganising of the conventional centre versus periphery model. In many works of Forest of Dean literature the Forest is centre, elsewhere is the periphery and at the margins.

Chapter 5.

Centre-Periphery: a Forest gaze

‘‘You can take your rails up now guv’nor, for I shan’t
want to be goin’ up there again.”
(Foley, 1992, 20)

The officer looked startled and peered more closely at
them. “Come quickly, then,” he said. And they did,
through the large oak gates of the city’s Southgate into
a different world – a world completely strange to the
two brothers who had never before ventured beyond
the Forest of Dean.
(Tye, 1998, 52)

Raymond Williams put it very plainly when he said that the description of any writing as ‘regional’, is an ideological act of discrimination and demotion, that firmly seeks to place that text outside of the cultural mainstream. ‘The life and people of certain favoured regions’, wrote Williams ‘are seen as essentially general, even perhaps normal, while the life and people of certain other regions, however interestingly and affectionately presented, are, well, regional’ (Williams, 1983, 230). To further illustrate his point he asked if a novel set in London, or indeed Bloomsbury, would ever be classed as regional, his rhetorical question making it clear that everything outside the centre (London) is considered to be regional. The denoting of a literary work as regional, in fact the very notion of the region, is an expression of a centre-periphery relationship model, and ‘is closely connected with the distinction between “metropolitan” and “provincial” culture’ (230). Developed during the 1960s and 70s in regard to disparities of global economic development (Korner, 2019, 190), the centre-periphery concept was soon taken up more broadly by the social sciences. In regard to both spatial, and cultural hierarchies (for example marginal social

groups outside the socially dominant), these relationships became ones of both value and power, the centre seen as the locus of both. Regional literature, and working-class writing for that matter, argues Williams, are not only considered to be culturally at the periphery, they are also considered to be wholly specialist genres. Regional work is seen to be about separate places and people with specific self-contained interests, not as work dealing with issues applicable to wider society and culture in general. Work generated from the centre, by contrast, is seen as dealing with the general, the universal experience. In such thinking regional work is separate from the mainstream yet it is also defined in relation to it. As Mignolo (2004 cited in Carlan et al, 2012, 9), puts it, the urban, the metropolitan, become the 'the locus of enunciation', with those areas outside it becoming 'the locus of the enunciated'. According to Ching and Creed's critique (1997, 4), the city, the urban centre, home of 'urbane', culture, is the normal, the assumed 'us', by which, and in relation to, all else (the presumed *them*) are defined, measured against and judged. The centre is the arbiter of that which is outside it, on the periphery.

This model of centre-periphery has, ironically, been further reinforced through writing and theorising that has sought to focus positive attention on the marginal, (for example hooks [sic], 1984; Shields, 1991; Cloke and Little, 1997; Norquay and Smyth, 2002). Geographical and/or social margins have been studied in attempts to recognise, understand, and value them in regard to their very outsider status. An approach that re-conceptualises and celebrates marginality as a 'space of resistance' (hooks [sic], 1990 cited in Soja and Hooper, 1993, 188), is one in which the marginal space (geographical and/or cultural), is seen as an opportunity to resist the ideological and cultural dominance of the centre. This reconceptualisation is one that seeks to positively exploit its very marginality. The peripheral here is a space that offers the potential for liberation from dominant ideologies, it is a space of license that allows for experimentation and potential re-formulation of social relations and identity, beyond the restrictive norms operating at the centre. This empowering, emancipatory

quality of the marginal space, is one that has historically been ascribed to forests.

Forests, understood as margins, or places beyond the normality of the city, are portrayed and understood as places that are 'Outside of the law and human society', and historically places where 'lived the outcasts, the mad, the lovers, brigands, hermits, saints, lepers, the maquis, fugitives, misfits, the persecuted, the wild men' (Harrison, 1993, 61). This is the forest, the margin, as an escape from conventional society, a place to create oneself anew amidst an alternative set of social relations, alternative to the mainstream of conventional civilisation (Saguaro, 2013). This is the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, a place away from court and the city where the individual is afforded free rein regarding gender and identity; a space in which relationships and issues can be resolved. This is the forest conceived as 'a place of alchemy and transformation', (Worpole, 2015), the forest of fairy tales (Maitland, 2012). The margins are seen as spaces of creativity, places of social, political and cultural experimentation and challenge, places of re-formation. They are places too of cohesive community, even utopias (Hetherington, 1998, Ch6), social relations within them offering alternative models of living. The periphery, 'the territorial fringe' (Holt and McClanahn, 2013, 203), can by extension take on a liminal role too as an in-between, sometimes ritual realm in which rites of passage, transition and transformation take place (Van Gennep, 1909 cited in Szakolczai, 2009, 141-2), further emphasising the periphery's cultural, political, and moral otherness status, and their spatial outside-ness. This concept of the liminal has been frequently applied to forests (for recent examples see Nagy, 1980; Weber, 2008; Laszkiewicz, 2017), perhaps the most notable in literature being the beginning of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the protagonist is in a forest, as a metaphor for spiritual confusion and fear, but also as gateway acting as a transitional zone, before entering into the inferno (for a detailed analysis see Harrison, 1993, 81-87).

The Forest of Dean as Liminal Space

The Forest of Dean lends itself to such liminal catergorisation: between Wales and the rest of England, a transitional zone, its people neither Welsh nor *really* English; not conventionally the countryside, nor urban; neither natural wilderness or park[107]. This view of the Forest as just such a liminal zone manifests itself in some of Forest of Dean literature.

Harry Beddington described the Forest of Dean as 'neither North nor South, East nor West', and a place that had been 'Harbouring through the years rebels from all quarters' (Beddington, 1977, 7), a place between, and a place of (as in Harrison, above) 'fugitives'. An even more explicit and striking description by Beddington of the Forest's in between, or liminal, status can be found in a programme for one of his, until now, forgotten plays. Beddington's incantation-like evocation is on the back page of the programme for his 1959 drama thriller *Limbo:*

> The Forest of Dean is a strange land, isolated between Severn and Wye, not on the Eastern side of Severn nor on the Welsh side of Wye, neither one nor truly t'other. Limbo.
>
> This half-wild stretch of hills and forest has many stories, half legend, of queer, strange happenings, grim wild deeds, deeds which have left their marks or imprints, still discernable, still potent, waiting, waiting, not active, nor inactive. Limbo.
>
> Old quarries where, even in clear sunshine, one looks hurriedly over one's shoulder. Dark, black holes, forbidding, frightening. Rooms in old houses where shadows flutter, disappear, or stand motionless, waiting, watching. There, yet not there. Limbo.

[107] It is not significantly agricultural; there is no large landowning squire class, and has been a place of heavy industry. It is not urban as the extent of its settlements are limited by the statutory forest. It is not a natural landscape as it is heavily managed through arboriculture, and marked by significant human interventions such as quarries, mines and spoil tips. It is not a park as it continues to be a working forest.

> Occasionally it so happens that persons unwillingly find themselves wandering on the borders of this strange hinterland of shade and shadow, where nothing is real yet frighteningly present, where fancies become real and reality slips out of reach of their clutching fingers and, for a moment, they peer fearfully into, Limbo.
> (Beddington, 1959)

The fate of this thriller's ghost, body trapped in a lost space between two walls of the old house, the boy's spirit trapped between the realm of the living and the dead, in limbo, is a metaphor for the Forest, a place in limbo, spatially located (trapped?) between Wales (the Wye a metaphorical wall on one side) and the rest of England across the Severn (a wall on the other side). As a place it is only 'half-wild', not fully wild; a place with stories that are 'half-legend', not completely legend; events that have left their marks 'not active nor inactive', creating a place where 'fancies become real and reality slips'. This fascinating and striking articulation of an archetypal liminal zone sees the Forest as a place of threshold between places, between cultures, between ways of being, generating stories that are between reality and fiction. Though Beddington's metaphor of limbo here is perhaps the most striking and explicit example, there are other examples of the Forest presented as a transitional, transformative space, that occur in several Forest novels.

In Sarah Franklin's *Shelter* (2017), Connie comes to the Forest from Coventry to work in the timber Corps, whilst Seppe is an Italian prisoner of war at one of the Forest prison camps desperate to escape the influence of his domineering Fascist father exerted, even at this distance, via a fellow inmate. The region as a whole is the space in which both Connie and Seppe undergo personal transformation throughout the course of the novel, the woods themselves offering a yet deeper transformative space. Similarly, in Louise Lawrence's *The Dram Road* (1983), teenager Stuart runs terrified from a dissolute life in the city after mugging a neighbour, eventually finding himself in the Forest of Dean. Through the care of a close-knit community, and contact with nature and the landscape, he re-forms, discovering a different version of himself because a particular place in the Forest 'The Dram Road had given him

himself, the decent precious person he knew he was' (208). This role of the Forest of Dean as transformative, liminal space, particularly in regard to teenage rites of passage, also occurs in Hebe Weenolsen's *To Keep This Oath* (1958). Set in the twelfth century, Jesu Maria is running away from his father's expectations of him when he is kidnapped from a Severn barge[108] and taken into slavery by Forest of Dean miners. It is in the Forest that he experiences love and loss, and under the influence of 'Ole Monk', learns his true calling of medicine and surgery. Jesu Maria eventually finds his way back to Devon; transformed now into an adult as a result of various trials, he is now ready to become head of the family seat. Another such teenage transformation in the Forest can be seen in John Moore's 1954 novel *White Sparrow.*

In *White Sparrow,* the mother of protagonist Tommy is White, his father a Black merchant seaman who is rarely at home, thus Tommy is suspended between two ethnic identities. Tommy has grown up and lives on the Welsh side of the River Wye but regularly crosses it (a threshold), to visit his friend Denis, on the Forest side, whose family have farmed there for generations. Moore describes Denis' family's relationship to the land in terms that resonate as a description of a long, ongoing connection to place:

> His father owned a little farm on the fringe of the Forest, which looked as if it had been there since Doomsday and would stay there till the crack of doom. The house was built of stone, weathered and thick…even Tommy, then aged nine, could perceive that everything had a place and a purpose here…this was a house in which nothing changed.
> (Moore, 1954, 30)

This home is contrasted to Tommy's where 'the furniture was always being moved' (30), and his father is always arriving and leaving, neither wholly present nor wholly gone, an in-between presence in his life.

[108] As in Camden, referred to in Chapter One of this thesis.

At one point, when Tommy is a teenager, his father is briefly at home on leave, so he and Tommy take a bus further into the Forest to the village of Ruardean for a drink. During the journey Tommy sees the trees as 'shodowy shapes at the edge of the road, watchful and ambuscaded, as if they waited to pounce', and as the bus passed 'they drew together, closing the road behind' (100). The central, wooded part of the Forest is here described as strange, threatening, other, as are the miners who fill the bar of the pub. In the pub Tommy's father is racially abused, so Tommy, experiencing such racism for the first time and wanting to force the situation to a full confrontation, purposely asks who killed the bears, knowing that it will provoke the miners. A full-scale fight with the miners ensues, necessitating Tommy and his father to fight their way out of the pub. In a reversal of offensive racial stereotyping, it is the Ruardean miners, who have just finished their shift and still covered in coal dust, who are described as having 'black faces and white gollywog eyes' (101). In this instance it is the Forest miners who are presented as savage others, dwellers in a strange and terrifying forest. For Tommy, they 'seemed to him more like animals than people' (108). The incident sees Tommy's transformation as he experiences the loss of his relative childhood innocence, and an induction by ritual trial into the sometimes brutal and racist world of adulthood for a person of non-White ethnic identity in 1950s England. This all takes place within the ritual, transformative, other space of the strange wooded Forest.

It is worth noting that all of these protagonists that experience such transformation in the Forest come into it from outside, crossing into it as into a strange other place, not a place of their everyday living. This liminal status afforded to it presumes, in effect requires, an external viewpoint: the Forest as exterior, other space, outside of the normal. When the Forest is home, that is normality, it assumes a very different role.

Emphasis on the marginal, the peripheral, the liminal status of a place or group, even when valuing this position or quality, maintains the relational hierarchy, such as between the regional (or provincial), and the metropolitan. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, much of Forest of Dean Literature

likes to emphasise its separateness, its social, cultural and geographical bounded isolation. As was shown, this is as more of a literary device rather than representing material reality. One interpretative approach could be to celebrate this very marginality of the Forest, revel in its outsider status, its liminality, as indeed Beddington appears to do. The case can be made for the value and artistic credibility of such literature as from the periphery, rural or regional work having its own special (though bounded and restricted) value. Many other examples, however, of Forest of Dean Literature suggest that an alternative reading may be more productive, the work resisting conventional impositions of a centre-periphery model. A more analytically productive approach is called for by the very content of the literature itself.

The Forest as Centre

Themes of periphery, the marginal, and the liminal, appear in many other works of Forest of Dean literature but these are the characteristics and roles ascribed to the spaces and places *outside* of the Forest of Dean. This challenges the conventional model and sees a reversal of spacial and conceptual relationships: in these works the Forest is the geographical centre, culturally central, the norm, and 'locus of enunciation'; it is those areas outside, in particular the urban that are the 'enunciated', they are defined according to their difference to the Forest. Whilst the Forest is connected with other regions, indeed with urban areas including London, it is in a relationship that requires a redrawn spacial and cultural cartography[109]. As Korner puts it, such a simple 'change of focus,' enables a redrawing of 'pre-established mental maps' (Korner, 2019, 5). In this case it sees a repositioning of those areas outside the Forest to become *its* periphery; other forms of society, settlement, and culture defined in relationship to it, *they* are the other.

109 This imaginary re-mapping is akin to the mediaeval Mappa Mundi's depiction of the world in which Jerusalem is at its centre, Europe and Britain orbiting satellites at its periphery (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001, 169).

In these examples of Forest of Dean Literature, the city becomes the locale for the un-civilized, the abnormal, the peripheral, and the lawless. Where conventionally it is in forests that 'chaos reigned', and where 'culture was not' (Tsouvalis, 2000, 9), in these Forest works that is instead how the city is described[110]. The city becomes the place outside the norms and bounds of accepted behaviour, the place of license and liberty, the space that offers opportunities for experimentation, and temporary or permanent transformation. It is to the city that Forest of Dean literary protagonists travel for opportunities to experience the transformative; it is the city that assumes a liminal quality, becoming the in-between space and the setting for protagonists' transition through various rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1909 cited in Szakolczai, 2009, 141-2).

The City as the Forest's Liminal Space

In Chris Tye's 1998 novel *Forest Heart: A Civil War Tale of a Forest Family*, adventure comes to two brothers, Will and Mark, as Parliamentary and Royalist forces fight for control of the Forest. Following a skirmish in their home town of Coleford, Mark is engaged by an injured Parliamentary officer to help him get to the city of Gloucester held by General Massey's Parliamentarian forces. On the way they pick up Will, who works in the foundry at Cannop (in the Forest), to act as guide through the newly erected fences put up by hated local Royalist Henry Wyntour, who has recently taken ownership of the Forest's woodland to provide charcoal for his forges. Crossing the River Severn, they dodge Royalist forces, finally racing under fire through the city gates to safety, and 'into a different world' (52). This different world, the city of Gloucester, a walled, bounded space, is peripheral to Coleford and the Forest, and it assumes for the brothers the role of a temporary transformative space. It is here that they, through various rites of passage, undergo their transformation into adulthood. They are 'in complete

110 As Ken Worpole wrote recently, in contemporary times the city has already taken on 'the role of the forest', as a place where people can become anonymous, mix with who they want 'and where a plurality of lifestyles, beliefs, and timetables co-exist, licensed or not' (Worpole, 2015).

awe of their new surroundings' (57), new experiences coming thick and fast, as Mark joins the cavalry and Will the artillery. Within a few pages Mark is on a sortie outside the city walls and into battle against Royalists. On his return to the city he is taken to bed by Amy, his first sexual encounter. In the city he is promoted to officer, a transformation in his social status, and one that he contemplates on leaving the city: 'He knew he would get used to things being different', now that he was an officer, and remembers his and his brother's arrival at Gloucester 'Two forest lads with everything to learn!' (Tye, 1998, 161). This is an acknowledgment of the transformation they have undergone in the city. Gloucester here is the peripheral, liminal space of transformation, whilst Coleford and the Forest are the centre, home that the brothers return to. The Forest is centre of the book's narrative action as battles are fought for its control as an important strategic location, a source of military resources (iron manufacture), and home of the enemy, Wyntour. Mark, now an officer, returns to Coleford, and then to nearby Highmeadow House that he secures as a local garrison, thus re-establishing Coleford as both personal, strategic, and narrative centre. In the final pages of the book, the war continuing but Wyntour ejected, Mark is offered the command of the Forest which he happily accepts, as 'His place was with his own people in Coleford' (226); his nearest city, Gloucester, only a peripheral concern, a place on the margins.

Tom Bevan's *The Thane of the Dean* (1899), opens with young Saxon lords Edwy and Gurth, having left their Littledean home and, in similar fashion to Tye's story, on route to Gloucester. In contrast to the intimate camaraderie of their night's stay with a family friend at Newnham (in the Forest), the next day Gloucester is 'thronged with bustling life', and 'Edwy's cheeks glowed and his eyes sparkled as he gazed on the animated scenes around him' (23-24). Reaching the city required the crossing of a significant threshold domain, first the ford to the island of Olney, then crossing the Severn again, and through the Western gate into the city itself. The significance of this literal and metaphorical passage (representing a crossing into the transformative space of the city, and a crossing into adulthood), is emphasised through the younger brother Edwy, this being his

first time beyond the Forest. The next day, a moment's reflection by Gurth finds him outside the city walls looking back towards the Forest 'Young, brave, hopeful, he was inexperienced in the ways of kings, and courts, and cities' (34). As inexperienced as he and his brother were, their plain speaking virtue and record of defending the Forest against Welsh raiders, wins them favour with the King (who is in Gloucester). Gurth, having passed his initiation into the ways of the court, and his business concluded successfully, the following morning 'he wished to be home again. City life was not to the liking of the free young forester' (75). Once again, the action of the story centres around the Forest of Dean itself, under attack from both a Norman lord, and by Welsh raiders transgressing by crossing the Wye. Though Gloucester is temporarily the place of the King, and thus royal power, it is as a place peripheral to the territorial struggle to control the Forest. Central state power is thus subordinated to the importance of local power, and the local conflict to attain or maintain it.

In Bevan's Elizabethan-period *Sea Dogs All: A Tale of Forest and Sea* (1911), the Forest offers Elizabethan explorer Sir Francis Drake a safe haven from the vicissitudes of the city and courtly life, a topic discussed in two exchanges with his friend, Sir Walter Raleigh also in the Forest. Drake admits that 'I have navigated unknown seas enough, but I should be shipwrecked in one month of court life' (23). Later, as Drake prepares to leave for Plymouth, he warns Raleigh to 'have a care – courts are slippery places in which to walk' (96). The main protagonist of the tale is John Morgan, a Verderer, like the trees it is his job to protect he is described as 'straight as a fir and tough as a young oak' (27), trees here a positive metaphor rather than something strange to be feared (as they were in the example from *The White Sparrow,* above). After later becoming involved in the successful putting down of the Catholic plot to burn the Forest[111], a message arrives that Morgan is wanted by the Queen at court. One of Raleigh's men finds Morgan at work on his farm and in a brief exchange the visitor is surprised that Morgan has no desire to leave his ancestral home to enjoy the

[111] The same Armada plot mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis.

attractions of the capital. Whilst briefly alone in the kitchen, the messenger comments to himself:

> A few trees and a muddy river make up his world. A winter in London will open his eyes and give him a broader view of life; then he will behave in a more leisured manner.
> (Bevan, 1911, 99)

Morgan tells the messenger that he does not 'propose to venture into London', instead he chooses to '"abide in the forest"' (99). Raleigh, knowing that Morgan 'is rooted to Severne [sic] side like an oak' (105), has addressed a letter directly to Mistress Dawe, inviting her and her father to London, knowing that only she will be able to persuade Morgan to come. Relocating Mistress Dawe, strongly associated by Morgan with home (his centre), to London they hope to draw him there. In the letter, Raleigh refers to the 'cool forest glades and greene paths', in contrast to the 'broil of ye towne', and 'close aire that cometh in from ye swelterrynge streetes' (104). Morgan (initially) is still not persuaded, instead asking '"What is London to home-dwelling forest folk?"' (105). The following exchange crystalises the differing views in regard to city life:

> " 'Tis the heart of the world," broke in Jeffreys, "and no man can say he knoweth life until he hath felt the pulse-beat of the great city."
> "I am woodland bred, good sir, and shrink from the prisonment of streets and walls. Half a day in Gloucester makes me fret like a caged bird."
> "A man must see life in its many aspects if he would claim to have lived at all, Master Morgan."
> "I do not agree. A man will see deeper into a stream if he sits and watches than will a fellow who splashes noisily about."
> (Bevan, 1911, 105-6)

This evocation of the centrality of the Forest to Morgan, the centre of his world and centre of meaning, also places the Forest at the centre of meaning in the story. Morgan does eventually agree to go to London, and the day after

arriving is very much the country-dweller abroad in the city. He is thankful he's not carrying the deeds to his land with him for fear that '"these rogues would have it from me in an afternoon walk"'(110). The bustling life of London is richly described during several journeys through the city, taking in recognizable sites such as The Tower and Shakespeare's Globe theatre. Far from being presented as admirable symbols of cultural superiority, these are instead places around which 'fops strutted, bullies swaggered, gentlefolks went in fitting dignity and beggars whined for alms'(136). Raleigh and Jeffreys are the city-wise guides, but even so, for all of their fascination with the cultural richness of the city, and in Raleigh's case the court too, their ties to Devon are never far below the surface, with Jeffreys soon feeling the pull of the sea. For these men too, London is ultimately not the centre of their existence, it is of relatively marginal concern. Morgan meanwhile is full of 'astonishment and healthy country disgust' (116), at the disrespect he sees in the people at work within the cathedral of St Paul's, because for him, it is not the Forest where 'chaos reigned', and where 'culture was not' (Tsouvalis, 2000, 9), but the city.

In *Sea Dogs All!,* as in *The Thane of the Dean,* the city is the place to become acquainted with a certain sort of power, that of the court, and to encounter it is a rite of passage. In *Forest Heart*, it is not the court as such but Parliament, (what will become the state's new centre of power), in the shape of Colonel Massey, that plays this role. In all three stories the city, court, Parliament, see themselves as centre, of power (able to confer favour or promotion, or not), of culture, and a place where surely everyone would want to be. In these stories though it is ultimately the Forest where power is actually won or lost, where the protagonists both start and finish, Mark in command of the Forest, Gurth now secure in his family seat, order restored whilst across the whole Forest 'all was happiness' (168).

Other examples of the centrality of the Forest can be found in the work of Winifred Foley, for example in *In and Out of the Forest* (1992, 15-23). She describes two rare daytrips out of the Forest for her village neighbours during

the 1920's. In the first, a group of men travel by train to London[112]. Innocents abroad, after a few minor mishaps and a round of sightseeing, they're all agreed that 'London was certainly a remarkable place, even if the people who chose to live there must be a lot of lunatics' (19). One of the party, young Matt, fails to make the train having been delayed by 'a pair of inviting eyes', spending the night with her in 'a room among the chimney pots', and arriving home the next day a 'wiser' (19-20), man, the city locale for his rite of passage. Bodger meanwhile, (quoted in the epigram above), is sure that one trip to London is enough, and can't see why he (or anyone else for that matter) should need to ever go there again. London, for Bodger, is of no relevance to him, and is certainly not central to him in any way. In the second trip described by Foley a group of women decide on a day at the seaside, rather than London, 'as of course', unlike the men 'they would be taking the children' (20). An enjoyable but less eventful trip afterwards sees the women relieved to be heading home, nonetheless, the day away from the village and their men, had for them too been a transformative experience. When greeted by a whining husband, waiting for her return to make him a cup of tea, one of the wives 'takes him by the scruff of the neck', to show him where the water, kettle, teapot and tea is '"that a' bin there these ten year we a' bin married […] so thee set to an' make it!"' (22-23). Foley concludes that 'going out into the world had broadened many an outlook' (23).

Foley's own personal rites of passage saw her leave the Forest for London. Waiting at the station a first threshold had to be crossed by her 'The little platform became the edge of the old world, the world I had known, as a child in the Forest' (Foley, 1974, 152). Gloucester, later passing by the train window, is yet another threshold marked and passed through. Returning home after only a few months, to help look after her sick sister she sees things anew, her perception transformed, 'Everything seemed to have shrunk' (173). Foley left the Forest again, and back in London met and married Syd. They spent a period

[112] As identified in Chapter Three of this thesis, an almost identical version of this anecdote was first used by Harry Beddington (Beddington, 1961, 4).

living in the Forest during the second World War but returned to London. Winifred's divided loyalties to each place came to a head as she woke from recurring dreams, in which she 'ran and ran all the way back from a London which had turned into dust' (Foley, 1981, 68). They soon after move back to settle in the Forest once again. Despite the periods in London she details in her books, it is the Forest that lies at the heart of her storytelling. Though London is the place where she reaches adulthood, meets Syd, starts a family, where her literary career begins transforming her into a published author, it is a place in which she is never truly settled, she is always 'in and out of the Forest', her life revolving around it as centre. London is peripheral, other, it is a temporary transformative space, before her returns to the Forest, as centre and normality.

Reorienting the Centre Periphery Model

In placing the Forest of Dean at the narrative heart of their stories these examples of Forest of Dean Literature call for a reorientation of the centre-periphery model. Whilst acknowledging certain types of power and culture are located in the city, the power and culture that matters to the protagonists is centred in the Forest. Whilst the city offers a temporary space of transformation, a locale for rites of passage; real meaning, before and afterwards, and real life, exists in the Forest. Rather than this being simply an assertion and celebration of this literature's regionality (emphasising its outside-ness and sealed off self-contained nature, its status as an exclusive and specialist genre), it is instead a rearrangement in which the city becomes demoted, of less importance, not central. The city may provide a temporarily central narrative moment, such as the transition into adulthood, but it is the Forest instead, however, where power that matters is struggled for, and achievements made by the now-adult selves at the centre of the stories. This radical reorientation is a statement of a local Forest of Dean sovereignty, a non-acknowledgement of objectification by that power, that viewpoint, that 'enunciation', that sits outside it. Approaching the work with this in mind affords another potential insight too, that the work sees

the world, especially the Forest in a particular way. It looks at the world from a particular Forest standpoint: it operates a Forest gaze.

a Forest gaze[113]

The theoretical concept of the gaze has been particularly productive as a way of understanding socially constructed points of view or ways of seeing the world. The following part of this chapter draws on some of the basic concepts of the gaze theory to inform a model of a Forest gaze. This is a description of a particular way of seeing and understanding the Forest that informs much of Forest of Dean literature.

Laura Mulvey's male gaze, first proposed in her 1975 paper 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', has subsequently spawned a host of other gaze theories such as (amongst many others) the female gaze (see for example Bowers, 1990; Friedman, 1992; Jacobsson, 1999), the urban gaze (Dubbini, 2002), Bell Hooks'[114] oppositional gaze (Hooks, 1992), and the festival gaze (Jamieson, 2004). The theory of the gaze as formulated by Mulvey is a way of understanding how the aesthetic act of both looking and depiction are enmeshed in a particular set of power relationships: the power of the viewer (male in Mulvey's model), and the absence of power in that which is being viewed (the female). Hazel Barnes neatly encapsulated the power more broadly inherent in the gaze by paraphrasing Jean-Paul Sartre's original formulation of 'le regard'. Barnes describes the act of being looked at as an act that 'judges me, categorizes me', and this 'threatens, by ignoring my free subjectivity,' and ultimately 'reduce[s] me to the status of a thing in the world' (Barnes, 1974 cited in Bowers, 1990, 219). To be subjected to the gaze is then to be subjected to someone else's power over you. Mulvey's model is deeply rooted in psychoanalytic theory and sees the act of gazing as a pleasurable experience in

[113] Presented in this way to emphasise that here this pertains to the Forest of Dean not forests in general.
[114] In the source cited, bell hooks is credited as author thus: 'Bell Hooks', so that format has been reflected here.

the possession of the male viewer. Male figures are represented in film (and arguably in other forms too) as heroic, and with agency, and therefore a figure to be admired by the male viewer: in seeing this figure the male viewer sees themselves. Female figures, by contrast, are reduced to objects of desire: something to be possessed by the male viewer. An additional level of complexity to this is that of internalization of the gaze, women for example being understood as viewing themselves as if through male eyes, and thus judging themselves purely in regard to male desire. John Berger explained this in *Ways of Seeing* (1972, Ch3) as being at once both 'the surveyor and the surveyed' (46), these two elements of a split identity being internalized within the self of the objectified individual. John Urry takes this idea and applies it to the effects of tourism. In *The Tourist Gaze* (1990 cited in Abrams, 2003), Urry explains the tourist gaze as that which seeks out sights and experiences of otherness, the strange and exotic[115]. This gaze can too, become internalised by the very objects of it, so that communities relying on income from tourism for example, shape their behaviour, dress, or built environment according to what is expected of them by tourists, in other words by how tourists see them. The local residents look at themselves as if through the eyes of the tourist.

Simone Abram's references Urry as she puts forward the concept of a rural gaze, in other words 'the social organization of the concept of "rural"' (Abram, 2003, 31). Abram's explains that the concept of the gaze is about more than simply looking, as not only does it involve all the senses, but it also includes the whole process of our perception and our understanding of the world. Drawing on Foucault's formulation of the gaze in regard to medicine[116], she reminds us that 'looking is not an innocent pastime' (Abram, 2003, 32), the very act of looking, the choice of what is looked at, how we see it, and what we think about it, are socially constructed. Our very perception of the world is therefore part of wider discourse. The rural gaze is part of the discursive process that shapes the very idea of the rural. What is seen as rural and named as rural, and what is not

[115] This can be applied to the gaze of those early-modern writers on the Forest, as described in Chapter One of this thesis.
[116] As formulated in his 1976 work *The Work of the Clinic.*

considered to be rural, can therefore be highly contested. This has even greater social implications because, as Abram demonstrates through reference to her own detailed case study of a Home Counties village, the rural gaze is not only implicated in the visual aspects of the village (affecting for example planning decisions), but also in how people should behave 'in a proper rural way' (40). The rural gaze, though founded in the visual, thus becomes a far broader symbolic set of understandings about what is and is not 'rural' in its broader social and cultural enactments. As Abram's case study demonstrates, with many examples, this contested idea of what the rural is, notwithstanding its fluidity, becomes utilised nonetheless in a policing of what is considered to be appropriate (morally, socially, environmentally) within the category of the rural.

Such formulations of the gaze present it as, on the whole, an act of oppression predicated on an imbalance of power. The viewer/subject possesses the power, and in the act of looking gazes upon the viewed/object that is powerless. Abram's case study demonstrates that differing positions held regarding what is and is not properly rural are not necessarily distributed according to a particular spatial or social demographic. Abram found that, for example, whether villagers were long-term residents or had just moved to the village was no predictor of their views. Not only did alliances exist between some old and new villagers, but even these very terms themselves were fluid and sometimes contested. There were instead simply a series of positions or viewpoints as to what constituted the rural, distributed variously across the village's population, no one group in particular was oppressing any other. It was, rather, the very act or process of the gaze itself (rather than who is necessarily gazing) that might be seen as oppressive, by definition the gaze requiring an object to be gazed upon. Other conceptions of the gaze, have though, argued that it might be alternatively deployed, re-appropriated as an act of empowerment.

The theory of the female gaze, for example, has been proposed as an empowerment of the female viewer, in the field of cinema films made by female directors expressing a female subjectivity. In regard to art and literature,

Bowers' study of the gaze of Medusa, traditionally seen by male artists and poets as a symbol of a destructive female desire, shows how this can be redeployed by women writers as an expression of powerful female agency and creativity. Bell Hooks[117], in 'The Oppositional Gaze', proposes just such a reclaiming and repurposing of the gaze, in this case in particular by Black women.

> Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency.
> (Hooks, 1992, 116)

In a rejection of the process of internalisation, for Hooks it is possible for the very object of the gaze to both recognise and critique it. The Black female viewer watching television or film in which a White male gaze is replicated, can recognise this for what it is. Hooks quotes Stuart Hall to explain that, in recognizing that this oppressive power is '"wholly external"', in other words that it is outside of the self, it can then be '"thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin"' (Hall, n.d. cited in Hooks, 1992, 116).

The radical conceptual empowerment of this simple formulation is one that sees a refusal of a model that assigns certain places and/or certain groups, as objects to be looked upon, or looked *down* upon. This recognition and critique of the gaze, looking at it and seeing it for what it is, enables it to be opposed, or indeed simply not accepted; it is '"thrown off"'. In the examples of Forest of Dean literature above (where the Forest is normality, the centre of enunciation) can be seen such a radical ignoring of the conventional gaze in which the Forest, its literature, and culture are seen as *merely* regional. Instead this is a refusal to be the object of the power of that particular gaze. Such alternative ways of understanding and reapplying the gaze as this suggest the possibility of a repurposing of the gaze that empowers rather than oppresses. In this regard a

[117] Respecting the typography of the source material, in this case bell hooks is 'Bell Hooks' here.

Forest gaze is proposed here as a particular way of looking at and understanding the Forest, one that sees the Forest as central, not other.

The Forest gaze might be understood as a way of perceiving and depicting the Forest of Dean that is Forest-centric. As discussed above, this places the Forest as the centre, norm and place of enunciation, whilst places outside it are its periphery. It assumes the Forest is *us* not *them.* This is a collective gaze *with* the Forest, a gaze that looks *with* rather than *at*, a looking that is enacted *amongst* rather than at a distance. As Abram has shown in regard to the rural gaze, a Forest gaze might too be understood as partly provisional, socially constructed, at times contested, an always provisional discourse that seeks to describe the Forest. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, such notions as, for example, the Forest being isolated have not been universally deployed in descriptions of the Forest, and so too the qualities of a Forest gaze may be varied, and uneven. If it is not to be firmly formulated in an emulation of Mulvey's male gaze, it can perhaps instead be glimpsed as points on a continuum. Two contrasting works may serve to illustrate.

The Gaze in *The Changing Forest*, and *A Fortunate Man*.

Both published in the 1960s, both deeply analytical, both depicting communities in the Forest of Dean, Dennis Potter's *The Changing Forest* (1962), and John Berger and Jean Mohr's[118] *A Fortunate Man* (1967), paint very different pictures of the Forest and its inhabitants. The intent of each book was very different. Potter's book was probing deeply into the changing social and economic life in the Forest, largely for its own sake, but also to see what lessons might be learned from this for Britain as a whole. Berger and Mohr were, in contrast, probing deeply into the contemporary role and social context of the

[118] The book was jointly conceived and worked on collaboratively, the aim being for the pictures to be more than mere illustration; rather they should work with the book as a whole. Here though for the purposes of comparison with Potter's work the focus is primarily on Berger's words.

medical General Practitioner, and their study, in effect, just happened to be set in the Forest of Dean[119].

Potter's book opens by bringing us on a journey into the Forest, describing the landscape as we ascend with him from the banks of the Severn up into the Forest, before focusing in great detail on the community in Berry Hill where he grew up. His book is however a portrait of a place rather than a landscape. Berger & Mohr too open with landscape, with two double-page photographs and two brief epigrams, one of which states:

> For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtain [of landscape], landmarks are no longer only geographic but also biographical and personal.
> (Berger and Mohr, 1967, 13)

In Berger and Mohr's book landscape as a screen is a filter through which social reality may be obscured, a curtain that must be pulled back by the authors. This is an exercising of a gaze at one step removed, landscape a problem to be overcome, a distraction, a veil that must be penetrated. Landscape for Potter is not problematised in such a way, instead it is integral to the place and people of the Forest; less something to penetrated rather than a setting, a lived place, to be described from within. Both books then open with landscape, but whereas Potter's is very specific to the Forest with lots of specific local detail, Berger and Mohr in contrast only focus on landscape as scenery that can obscure, as a distraction, with little sense that it might be something that nurtures or inspires. They look also to the Forest's geography and how it serves to reinforce generic, rural social and cultural marginality.

Potter is very present himself within *The Changing Forest*, himself part of the story[120], exploring and reflecting on his own relationship to the place and its

[119] The doctor in *A Fortunate Man*, 'Dr Sassall', was in reality Berger's own personal doctor and friend, Dr John Eskell, and though not explicitly named in the book, the village in the Forest was St Briavels.

[120] This is arguably in the style of what would later become known as New Journalism (Wolfe and Johnson, 1973), and also Potter in the mode of proto-autoethnographer (Hayano, 1979); topics for further, future analysis.

people, himself a part of the community he is writing about. There is no such authorial presence in *A Fortunate Man*, never a sense of Berger and Mohr personally being in the village, in the surgery, or in the homes, when the consultations happen (except of course by implication). Berger is the distanced, omnipotent author. His emphasis was on showing how social reality is shaped by Marxian historical processes, and this called for a detached analysis and explanation. The real Dr. Eskell becomes 'Sassall', arguably, to give greater license to Berger in his writing of this now anonymised character in his book. This act of depersonalisation (despite the elements of psychological detail in the portrait of Sassall) is an attempt to present *a* doctor in general, rather than a specific individual man. Whilst Sassal might be a rural doctor in a village in the Forest, the book is really '…about a GP anywhere' (Huntley, 2001, p546). The other people in *A Fortunate Man*, are similarly composite case histories rather than recognisable individuals; their role to act as archetypes of conditions, both social and medical; their role in the narrative that of *the* patient, to Sassall as *the* Doctor. In stark contrast the majority of the people in Potter's book have names, individual detail and voices, and they come alive off the page as distinct individuals. The circumstances of their lives are illustrations of how particular social and economic forces effect people, but as real individuals all the same. They, as individuals, are the starting point, rather than simply in regard to their function within the analysis. The people in Potter's book are also acknowledged as friends, and family members, all part of a social network that related them to each other, and to him, all connected with place.

The difference in these respects, and more, between both books is a difference in their gaze. Potter's gaze in *The Changing Forest*, is an inclusive one. Though he is of course the author, selecting what we see, who we hear from, and what we hear from them, he presents us with a diverse range of local participants, of different generations, different jobs and community roles, and with different points of view; and we hear them speak with him. He is present in the book, engaging in conversations. Where Berger omnisciently reports what he *overhears*, Potter reports what people say to him in conversations in which

he *engages*: 'I was not only asking questions, of course', Potter points out 'and I was not listening-to-make notes' (Potter, 1962, 76). Potter presents us with what he sees on our behalf, he is our guide and intermediary, but he is involved corporally in each scene, he is there. He is honest too about his relationship with the story he is telling, and the people he talks with. He acknowledges his deep connection to the Forest, but also his newly acquired status as an Oxford graduate and how that has influenced his perspective, as well as how some people in the Forest now see him because of that. His gaze is on the wider community of his family, friends and neighbours he talks with, people he knows and is socially connected to still. This is a community he is still part of, so in this sense, and in regard to his level of self-examination, his gaze is also directed partly at himself as object too. Potter has a personal stake in what he is gazing upon. In contrast, Berger's gaze is, though detailed, a gaze of the disinterested and distanced social scientist. Despite all of Berger's partiality, his class, cultural and political, and male, positions are never acknowledged as his, rather the text is presented as an objective statement of fact, an impartial looking, a disinterested gaze. Potter's and Berger's differing ways of looking, their different gazes, unsurprisingly perhaps, produce different perspectives on the Forest.

Berger's description of individual patients focuses on their inner psychological lives in novelistic style, they are Berger's creation. The case studies are archetypal, patients as products of their social and economic contexts. His depiction of the community as a whole, beyond that of the collective category of mere patients, is in comparison relatively brief and largely dismissive. His assessment of the Forest is that it is 'economically depressed', and that there are 'no large scale industries' (Berger and Mohr, 1967, 83). He describes the Foresters as 'neither a proletariat nor a traditional rural community', noting instead that 'They have something of the character one associated with wandering traders like tinkers' (83). Later in the book (125), he describes them as 'culturally deprived', their hopes of living a full life 'impossible'. Left instead in 'groping and sometimes blind unhappiness', he wonders 'do they not then secretly wish to die?'. Such a bleak appraisal of the Foresters and their lives is in

stark contrast to Potter's picture of a still-vibrant, though admittedly changing, rich cultural and social life in the Forest.

Whilst Berger and Mohr's book has been critically acclaimed (for example Huntley, 2001; Feder, 2005; Loxtercamp, 2013; Francis, 2015) for its detailed exploration of general medical practice and the societal role of doctor, Berger's dismissive pronouncements on the Forest of Dean community has attracted (on the rare occasions it has been considered at all) some criticism. A review in the *Dean Forest Mercury*, at the time of the book's publication, though on the whole in praise of the book in regard to its depiction of the doctor, was not impressed with its depiction of the Forest:

> Mr. Berger's estimate of Sassall is, we believe, much more accurate than his estimate of Foresters and the Forest […] the Forest has had nearly 30 years of near prosperity […] In actual fact it is highly improbably [sic] that the inhabitants of Sassall's village are any more deprived of culture than those of the average village in any other part of the British Isles which is not near a big city.
> (T.B., 1967)

Though their doctor, Eskell, is still today on the whole remembered with much admiration and respect (see Harris, 2018; Wellham and Wellham, 2018), in St Briavels[121], Berger and his book about Eskell was not similarly taken to heart (see Biddle, 2018). Berger seems to have accurately captured Eskell's standing in the village and relationship with his patients, but less so his portrayal of the Forest and Foresters as a whole. When a new paperback edition of the book was published in 2015, the book was again praised in regard to its exploration of the inner life of a working G.P., but amongst the reviews was a highly critical

[121] In working recently with the village (along with my Reading the Forest project colleague Dr Roger Deeks) on two exhibitions, firstly about the book focusing primarily on Berger's contribution, and the following year on Mohr's photographs (joined by Dr Julia Peck), it became clear that the focus of interest amongst villagers who remember the period was Eskell himself, not the book.

response to Berger's depiction of the Forest of Dean in a piece by former G.P., Dr Roger Jones, editor of the *British Journal of General Practice*:

> I grew up in the Forest of Dean and, while recognising its comparative social isolation, bridled at Berger's patronizing depiction of Forest folk as uncultured half-wits.
> (Jones, 2015)

As Hannah Bradby (2017), has also pointed out, the picture of the Forest and Foresters in *A Fortunate Man*, failed to take into account where figures such as Roger Jones (or for that matter Dennis Potter, or other Forest authors and artists) fitted into Berger's picture of the Foresters as simply 'poorly educated' (Berger and Mohr, 1967, 83).[122]

It would be all too easy to assume that Berger's lack of insight into the Forest was because he was simply insufficiently familiar with the place, spending as he did only a few weeks following Eskell working. Berger and Mohr were indeed only visiting. Berger had though, as T.B. (1967) pointed out, previously lived in the Forest of Dean. Research for this thesis[123] can reveal that Berger's second wife, the Honourable Rosemary Sibell Guest[124], whom he married in 1955 (Ancestry.com, 2010), had bought The Dower House in the village of Newland after the break-up of her previous marriage (Boyd, 2018), and at some point Berger had moved there too, appearing on the local electoral register for 1959 (Ancestry.com, 2016). It was during this period that he got to know John Eskell as his doctor and a 'fellow intellectual' (Eskell, 2018), and the Forest. To what extent Berger mixed with the wider Forest community is unclear, however intriguing additional evidence has come to light indicating his views, admittedly

[122] Another criticism in regard to the book's omissions and over simplifications came from Eskell's near-neighbour and patient, the critic Phillip Toynbee who, though full of praise for the book on the whole, criticised it for the absence of Eskell's wife in it, she in reality being crucial in both helping to run the practice, and in managing her husband's depression (Francis, 2015). Other figures who supported Eskell's work (see Wellham and Wellham, 2018), were also omitted from the book. Berger's portrayal of both the doctor and the Forest was then highly selective and partial.

[123] Also informing the Berger profile page at Readingtheforest.co.uk

[124] An author herself having previously published two novels under the penname Evelyn Jordan. Neither of these feature the Forest of Dean so are not within the scope of this thesis.

some five years after publication of the book, on at least part of the Forest. In what was a very supportive letter to then young film student Jeff Perks, who was to make the short film *A Fortunate Man* (1972), based on the book and filmed in the Forest, Berger wrote: 'Cinderford is a strange and terrible town. The Foresters won't trust you – but they may like you' (Berger, ca1972). To be fair to Berger he was, if in rather more forthright language, not alone in this view of Cinderford (see Baty, 1952, 23-25). The letter suggests knowledge of the Forest, but it is a view from without, the Forester and Foresters as object.

The Forest of Dean for Berger then was far from an unknown land, his gaze upon it, his version of it, was informed at least to some extent by having lived in the area for around five years. His depiction of the Forest and Foresters was not necessarily due to lack of familiarity with the Forest, rather it was simply the result of his particular epistemological approach: seeking to explore general underlying social causes. He was not focused on creating an account of the Forest of Dean so much as he was looking to give an account of a general marginalized proletariat-type class as a whole, as a body of socially located patients with whom a doctor works: the patients who exemplified this just happened to live in the Forest. By the time Berger wrote the book he had long since left the Forest having separated from his second wife. Though he remained friends with Eskell until Eskell's death in 1982, Berger no longer (if he ever had) had any reasons to consider how his account appeared to the other residents of the Forest as he was no longer invested in it (if he ever was) as a community. He had shown the draft text of *A Fortunate Man*, to Eskell for his opinion (Huntley, 2001, 547), but as far as we know he did not seek the views of any of the other Foresters objectified in his book. The gaze in *A Fortunate* Man, is an external(ised) gaze, in contrast to Potter's Forest gaze.

Dennis Potter's gaze on the Forest was infused by his deep connections to it as a place. It was informed by his wider network of personal and family friends, and his acquaintances in and around the Forest who, quite simply, gave him both a broader and deeper type of access to the Forest of Dean community. Where Berger, on the whole, saw Foresters in extremis, as Eskell's patients;

Potter saw Foresters at their place of work, in their social club (*his* social club too), or supporting the local rugby club (*his* club too), or in conversation with them in a local café as fellow Foresters. Potter had discussed in his documentary *Between Two Rivers* (1960), his personal sense of division in his cultural identity; between his working-class Forest roots, and his new status as Oxford graduate. The first half of the programme represented his gaze as Oxford graduate, looking down upon the working-class culture of the place where he grew up. In the second half he realises the value of this culture, its ability to retain qualities and meanings that can resist the worst excesses of mass commercial culture, and he signals his intention to return to the Forest with his family. This new sense of respect for and valuing of the Forest was something he explored in greater depth in *The Changing Forest*, and the book represents a more straightforward and unified position, or gaze, in regard to it. Potter's other depictions of the Forest, some critical and locally contentious, such as *A Beast with Two Backs* (1968), represent all the same a gaze from within. His representation of the bear story is, on one level, a depiction of suspicion of the outsider, but on another, how people can be manipulated by malign influences from within a community. It is not a simplistic dismissal of Forester's as merely a backward rural folk. The gazes then of Potter and Berger are differently motivated, and differently informed. It is a matter of focus, a position adopted in relation to the Forest, a way of seeing the Forest. Unpalatable as Berger's description of the Foresters might[125] be to a Forest readership, it is a position nonetheless based on some close observation and some experience of living in the Forest.

a Forest gaze

As discussed above, the Forest gaze as a theory remains provisional, a point on a continuum that might be recognised in how it differs from the gaze that is more obviously external as exemplified by Berger, or, as another example,

[125] Anecdotally, in a private email to me, one local person, having grown up and always lived in the area, felt regarding *A Fortunate Man,* that 'The author's observations on the area and the foresters were spot on in my view'.

John Moore's view of the Forest in his book *The Welsh Marches* (1933), a fairly straightforward example of Urry's tourist gaze in action. Just as with Abram's conception of the rural gaze, the Forest gaze too is not necessarily in the possession of one particular group, and those groups are themselves not always easy to define. Potter, born in the Forest, spent much of his life away from it, though he maintained strong links with it; Foley too, spent large portions of her life away; whilst Ralph Anstis, for example, an author who moved to the Forest only in much later life, was a writer of history and fiction that described the fine grain of the Forest from within, his work arguably demonstrating a Forest gaze. The qualitative difference between work that might be described as exerting a Forest gaze and that which does not, could perhaps rather be understood as one to be felt as a reader in relation to the text. For the reader from within the Forest, to be subjected to a gaze from without is to be the object of that gaze and subjected to its power. To, in contrast, be subjected to a gaze from within, is to be seen from within, the reader and author as *we,* the *us*, not the *them.*

The application of a Forest gaze may work with some complexity, as can be seen in the work of Harry Beddington. When Beddington writes about Foresters it is a 'thay' (Beddington, 1977, 12), that he describes, never an *us* or a *we,* yet it is expressed in his obvious Forest persona, complete with Forest dialect. He is adopting the external gaze of the social scientist, like Berger, seeking to describe and analyse the Forest and its inhabitants (the 'Vorester', 'thay'). But, unlike Berger, Beddington does so ironically, obviously (through the convincing use of dialect throughout, and other signals such as intimate knowledge of the Forest and its characters) being part of the group he is describing. Beddington's way of looking at the Forest is not an internalisation of an external gaze (as in Mulvey's female internalisation of the male gaze, or Berger's the surveyor and the surveyed, as described above), it is instead a recognition of the external gaze (as in Hooks, also described above) as position, or a process, whilst radically reappropriating its work. Beddington is describing the Forest from within whilst using the vehicle of looking from without, thus

taking ownership of the observations, turning them into points of pride rather than critique or ridicule.

Forest of Dean literature is a literature of place, but the positions its authors adopt from which to look at it vary; sometimes from without, sometimes from within. This may be the externalised position of the author (such as Berger, or John Moore), or the character through whose experience we, the reader, see the Forest (such as those of Franklin, Lawrence, Weenolsen, or Moore's 'Tommy'). Equally from authors within (such as Drew, Harvey, Potter, Foley) or characters within (Bevan's 'Morgan', the Wulf brothers, or Chris Tye's 'Will' and 'Mark'). One consistent concern of Forest of Dean literature is that it is a literature that seeks to express the distinctiveness of the Forest, to mark it out as a geographical and cultural territory; whether from without or within. At times this may be through reaching for concepts that describe it as a forest much like any other, on the margins, a place of liminality; whilst for others it is the centre, the norm, the 'locus of enunciation' (2004 cited in Carlan et al, 2012, 9). In placing the Forest at the centre, it seeks to simply ignore its designation as regional literature, or at least in as much as this 'demotes' (as Williams puts it above), rather it is a literature of place, a specific place, but much like any other writing, whether set in the heart of metropolitan London, or indeed Bloomsbury rather than a specialist, limited, secondary literature.

Conclusion

At the very beginning of this research a very seductive narrative seemed to suggest itself, two books almost exactly a century apart seeming to mark, respectively, the birth of Forest of Dean literature in the nineteenth century, and its revival in the twentieth. Nicholls' *The Forest of Dean; An Historical and Descriptive Account,* published in 1858, was the first history of the Forest of Dean in its own right and it appeared to be the founding text in the history of Forest of Dean literature, a distinctive Forest of Dean expressed in the pages of its one volume; a source of history, stories and ideas about the Forest. At first glance this could be taken as source and inspiration for work later in the century set in the Forest of Dean, such as Mayne Reid's *No Quarter!* (circa 1880), Crawley-Boevey's two volumes of *Dene Forest Sketches* (1887, and 1899), and Tom Bevan's *The Thane of the Dean* (1899); all rich in specific local detail and history. Just over one hundred years later Dennis Potter's *The Changing Forest* (1962) was published, his detailed social enquiry into the Forest of Dean then. As Nicholls had captured the Forest seemingly during a period of increasing industrialisation, Potter's book captured that same industrial period coming to an end. A few years after Potter's book Nicholls' was itself republished (in 1966). Shortly afterwards came Winifred Foley's success on the radio and the publication of *A Child in the Forest* (1974), the opening of The Forest Bookshop, and then publications by Harry Beddington, Bill Tandy, Keith Morgan, Joyce Latham, and other Forest authors.

As this thesis has demonstrated, however, important as both Nicholls' and Potter's books were, the history of Forest of Dean literature has proved to be far more complex, longer, and indeed far richer. Several decades before Nicholls' 1858 book there were four writers at work who could indeed be said to be the founding writers of Forest of Dean literature; Wickenden, Morse, Drew, and Ducarel. Again, however, even this is far from simple, Wickenden, for example, though known as Bard of the Forest, wrote (as David Adams has revealed) mostly work unconnected with the Forest of Dean. Whilst some of

Wickenden's work that did depict the Forest did so in terms that described it as natural landscape much like any other, it was he who first used Forest dialect in a literary work, and began to portray, even in his globetrotting fictionalized auto-biography, the essence of the witty and wily Forester. The Forest Poetess, Catherine Drew, from humble Forest origins and remaining in the Forest all of her life, never wrote in dialect, but her poems did describe a distinctive history and contemporary life of the Forest; a rich source to this day. Ducarel, an author largely forgotten locally, penned a sympathetic portrait of the native Foresters as having 'Stout hearts of brass' (Ducarel, 1836, 123), in his epic poem set in the Forest, though only five years before he had read the riot act as Foresters tore down crown enclosures. Morse, in his small body of work, captured some key aspects of Forest identity, such as the nuances of Foresters' relationship with the crown, whilst many of his poems too show little connection to it. These first authors of Forest of Dean literature wrote then a variety of work from a range of positions in relation to the Forest, contributing to a varied and gradual development of Forest of Dean literature.

The authors that, in the twentieth century, at first glance appeared to emerge after Potter's 1962 publication, had in reality been writing long before; Beddington as early as the 1940s, Foley, as has now been revealed, as early as the 1950s. Smoking concerts, social clubs, and the local amateur drama scene have been shown to be significant as opportunities for many Forest writers in the twentieth century to develop their ideas and their writing, honing their material to work for a local audience and readership. By the time Doug McLean arrived and opened his bookshop there was already an active Forest of Dean literature in place. The significance of F. W. Harvey's radio series *My Friends the Foresters* (1935), revealed by Deeks (2013), has been examined in more detail in this thesis to uncover the nature of its contribution to perceptions of the Forest amongst the wider population and amongst the Forest authors that followed him. This again traces the lineage of the latter twentieth-century flourishing of Forest of Dean literature back to earlier in the century. In summary, a far more

complex and nuanced picture of the development of Forest of Dean literature has been revealed.

This thesis provides an initial genealogy of Forest of Dean literature and its development. It has traced aspects of its literary DNA to an even earlier period; tropes that first appeared in early-modern writing about the Forest reappear repeatedly in Forest of Dean literature up until the present day. It has traced the trajectory of recurring stories too, from the Forest raids on Severn barges, and the threat of the Spanish Armada to burn the Forest; to the story of the killing of the bears, and more recent anecdotes such as the outhouse in the fog, and the request to take the rails up on return from London. Commonalities discovered between texts and across time support the central theory of this thesis that these are works that, taken together, can productively be approached as Forest of Dean literature. It is a body of writing that has sought to describe the Forest as a place, and as a cultural figure. It is literature that has sought to express the distinctiveness of the Forest as a place in its own right, rather than merely the countryside or simply a region of Gloucestershire.

By exploring the work of already recognised authors such as F. W. Harvey, Dennis Potter, and Winifred Foley as contributors to Forest of Dean literature, and indeed even John Berger (his connection to the Forest rarely acknowledged), the intention has not been that of reduction (i.e. that their work set in or about the Forest is *only* Forest of Dean literature), rather instead, it has been to open up additional analytical opportunities.

Harvey was a soldier-poet, broadcaster, a writer of Gloucestershire, but once he moved to the Forest of Dean he also became a writer occupied with describing the distinctiveness of the Forest. Potter, arguably the most significant creative force in British television drama of the 1960s-1990s, was before that a writer who captured the fine grained detail of the Forest of Dean as its economy and social life responded to national and international currents. The Forest remained a crucial aspect of his identity and it repeatedly appeared in his work, including his very last television drama. Understanding Potter's relationship to the Forest is part of understanding him as a writer and his work. Berger, a writer

who ranged across art and literary criticism, the novel, and many other forms, and an internationally significant cultural voice, wrote about a Forest village and its relationship to its doctor. For all of its external viewpoint pronouncements on the Forest, *A Fortunate Man*, considered as Forest of Dean literature has still afforded new analytical insights to it as a work, and additional biographical detail to Berger's life.

Winifred Foley's work, seen through the lens of Forest of Dean literature, can be understood as one of several working-class, female Forest authors. Foley in the context of Forest literature is also emblematic of a local cultural turn towards the past. In what is a significant intervention in regard to the understanding of Winifred Foley's career and status as writer, this thesis demands a considerable reframing of her as a writer. Foley had been writing far longer than assumed in the current narrative of her as the raw, undeveloped writer of her own simple memories of a working-class life who was reluctantly thrust into the limelight almost by chance. Whilst her career as a successful published author was indeed launched through *A Child in the Forest,* on BBC Radio's *Woman's Hour*, research for this thesis has uncovered that not only had her writing appeared on the BBC several years prior to this, but she was also by the 1970s a well-developed and ambitious writer determined to be heard. Foley is not then, *simply*, a working-class voice: Foley is an author.

This research has also added to the story of Harry Beddington, an author who has remained, on the whole, known only to a local readership. Beddington's drama scripts have begun to be rediscovered, as memory of their original performances have faded from local collective memory, revealing a prodigious writer. His work can now be seen as part of a wider national project between the wars to stimulate local drama writing and performance. Other work by Beddington, currently with his estate, remains to be explored and it includes several drama scripts and an (as yet) unpublished children's story. Beddington's dedication to writing in Forest dialect is unique amongst Forest authors, his friend and fellow performer Keith Morgan the only writer demonstrating anything near the same level of commitment to the use of it. Beddington's use

of dialect in drama, poetry and prose can now be explored within the much wider context of other twentieth-century English dialect writing in the UK, and the English-speaking diaspora. Just as Harvey, Potter and Foley need not, cannot, be seen as examples of Forest of Dean literature only, so too authors such as Beddington, and the many other lesser known Forest authors, who have until now only been thought of as Forest authors.

Research for this thesis has begun to uncover a host of lesser known Forest authors, some of them having published only a single volume, sometimes in very small numbers, who might equally be considered as not just authors of Forest of Dean literature but part of the history of English literature as a whole. This thesis has indeed sought to explore their work primarily as examples of literature of place within the context of the Forest of Dean, however, now that light has been shone on them they need not be limited to only that interpretative lens. As has been pointed out, those Forest memoirists of the 1970s and 1980s were part of the wider developing interest in working-class voices contributing to a richer understanding of history. Looking to the earliest period of Forest of Dean literature, for all of Catherine Drew's specificity in describing the Forest, she was at the same time just one of very many labouring-class men and women poets being published around that time. A very concrete example of a contribution to wider literary scholarship this research can make will be the addition of Catherine Drew to the ongoing project *A Catalogue of British & Irish Labouring-Class & Self-Taught Poets & Poetry c. 1700-1900* (Goodridge, 2019).

Describing the work explored within this thesis as Forest of Dean literature is part of that very same process described in Chapter Four, that of marking out boundaries. These boundaries, and the idea of the Forest as isolated were, shown to be largely an invention that become increasingly prevalent in Forest of Dean literature of the second half of the twentieth century, though as cultural figures none the less important. Just as, however, the supposed physical and cultural boundaries of the Forest were in reality shown to be highly porous, and indeed even providing opportunities for exchange, so too its literature. This

is not a sealed off, isolated body of literature that can *only* be understood as a literature of place, a literature only of the Forest of Dean. There is work here that speaks to the general and the universal, just as much as (to refer to Williams' example cited in Chapter Five of this thesis) a novel set in Bloomsbury does. This thesis has chosen though to look primarily at the work in regard to how it has expressed ideas about the Forest, and does so unapologetically as a recognition of both the value and importance of such a parochial approach.

Looking once again to Fiona Stafford's *Local Attachments* (2010), she refers to Seamus Heaney's 1995 Nobel acceptance speech that she sees as an advocacy for the importance and value of poetry rooted in place. He was, says Stafford, 'elevating the idea of the "local" as the touchstone for the best kind of art' (Stafford, 2010, 5). Stafford points out that Heaney's view regarding local writing owed much to that of poet Patrick Kavanagh's distinction between the 'provincial', and the 'parochial'; the former implying a sense of both relational definition with, and inferiority to, the centre; the latter in 'no doubt about the importance of its *own* sphere' [my emphasis] (5). A similar case for the value of the local is made by Sue Clifford and Angela King (1993), in regard to a more general (i.e. place as a whole) local distinctiveness. They talk of the importance of the 'scale', of a place, such that there is a sufficient 'fineness of grain', and that 'locality needs to be defined from the inside', with 'less abstraction, more detail' (11). Forest of Dean literature makes a contribution to that definition from the inside.

Such has been the aspiration of this thesis, exploring the literature of the Forest of Dean as an expression of such fineness of grain: literature of the Forest, specifically, as a distinctive place, 'Not', for example, literature of 'just "the country"' (Potter, n.d., cited in Carpenter, 1998, 87). Both Clifford and King, and Stafford, are keen to point out that such a valuing of the local, the parochial, should not be to the exclusion of that and those outside of the region, rather it is a rooted base for a sense of understanding of, and belonging to, place that also connects outwards. 'A cosmopolitan stands with roots in empty air – like a tree upside down', said F. W. Harvey (1939, 16), part of his contribution to a

programme about the new status of the Forest of Dean as a national forest park. Rather than a statement of his personal identification with the Forest, however, it was an invitation to the listener to come here themselves, to visit and experience a place of rootedness, that anyone might feel the experience of belonging (if only temporarily whilst they visited). In similar fashion, Keith Morgan's 'Varest National Anthem' (Morgan, 1985), far from a nationalistic-type expression of identity, talks of a place where 'Thou ousnt vind a warmer welcome if thous's travel ver an' wide'. Experiencing a sense of belonging to a place, knowing it fully, can generate strong emotions, 'strong visceral feelings', in which one might 'know it as one person knows another' as cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan put it (Tuan, 1975, 151). Dennis Potter had already expressed just such a sense of attachment to the Forest in 1960:

> I remember that the first time I left the Forest of Dean for any length of time […] I cried with the kind of sick passion of those who love a place almost as much as they love a person.
> (Potter, 1960, 41)

Potter's 1960 work was more widely prescient in its exploration of culture, politics, community and belonging, and his fear that a transatlantic, mass culture was replacing a more place-centred working-class culture. More recently, Paul Kingsnorth, in 2015, expressed similar concerns about such disregard for a sense of place and identity in his phrase 'citizens of nowhere'. Less a damning of an open-minded and diverse culture, this was a plea for a sense of local distinctiveness in much the same way as Clifford and King. Kingsnorth too suggested a 'radical parochialism' (*The Guardian*, 2015) as a possible means to resists the worst aspects of globalisation and place-less-ness. Forest of Dean literature can be seen as making such a contribution to the distinctiveness of the Forest. In exploring the Forest of Dean's literature this thesis has identified a literature rooted in but not limited to the Forest of Dean. It is a literature that speaks of a specific, distinctive place, and though much of it puts the Forest at its centre this might be seen as merely a refusal to be

marginalised, an expression of the importance of that which is near and understandable in its fine grain. Forest of Dean literature is an expression of this fine grain, an expression of a specific place and its local distinctiveness. As has been shown in Chapter Five, at times this has been expressed from without, at times from within; sometimes with detachment, sometimes with a distinctly Forest gaze.

This thesis has in effect suggested a new literary territory, that of Forest of Dean literature, and in making this contribution it acknowledges that it has not, could not, fully explore and map all of it. There is then potential for much further research. Further biographical research regarding, for example, Catherine Drew, one of the first authors of Forest of Dean literature, may reveal further insights into her beginnings as a poet and the status of her work during her lifetime. Nicholls' seeming enthusiasm for her as a poet and his involvement with local education raises the question as to whether or not she was taught in local schools. Many of the authors mentioned all too briefly in this work, for both practical and thematic reasons, await further illumination too, of both their biographies and their writing. Forest of Dean literature is rich and varied, and many of its individual texts await further academic attention in their own right. In particular, the two Forest novels of Tom Bevan; Reid's *No Quarter!*; and S. M. Crawley Boevey's two volumes of *Dene Forest Sketches* (1887, and 1899), all await detailed textual analysis as fine examples of Forest of Dean literature. Some of this work is underway as part of the Reading the Forest project. Whilst that project's aim is the creation of accessible and engaging material for general public consumption, it will also seek opportunities to research and publish work of a more academic orientation. Authors such as Ada M. Trotter, identified as an author of Forest of Dean literature through research for this thesis, have a fascinating story to tell about emigration and the Forest diaspora, and more widely about female writers of the period. Trotter's two Forest-set novels can tell us much about her view on the Forest at the time, but also positions in regard to women, class, religion, and American and British culture in the 1880s.

As early research for this thesis sought to understand why Berger wrote about a *Forest* doctor, so too questions remain as to why such authors as, for example, Hebe Weenolson, or James Playsted Wood, chose to set work, or parts of works, in the Forest.

There is potential for further work on some of the better known authors touched on in this thesis, from the perspective of them as authors of Forest of Dean literature. For all the critical attention paid to Dennis Potter and his work, for example, there remains further analytical insights to be gained through more detailed exploration of the extent to which his ongoing relationship with the Forest of Dean, influenced his work and career.

During the course of research for this thesis extensive papers of Harry Beddington, including some unpublished work, have been identified. Cataloguing, housing and safeguarding these will open this work up to future scholarly attention, and wider appreciation, and in the first instance tell more of the story of him as an author and dramatist. Further work may reveal other lost or forgotten works that may further expand the field of Forest of Dean literature.

This thesis has revealed the role that the local drama scene played in Beddington's development as a writer and in so doing has begun to illuminate the importance and strength of amateur drama in the Forest in the first half of the twentieth century. The development of his work, and other authors of Forest of Dean literature in the smoking parties and clubs of the twentieth century, and captured later by McLean's audio recordings, has shown that the Forest is a place that incubates and appreciates its writers. Today this is reflected in the success of the Forest Faddle, authors continuing to write Forest literature, and the enthusiasm with which the work of the Reading the Forest project has been received.

In revealing Forest of Dean literature this thesis has sought to take its version of the Forest seriously, and to read its version of the Forest. It has established an initial genealogy of Forest of Dean literature, but there remain many more stands of its literary DNA to be uncovered, and braches of its family to be mapped.

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